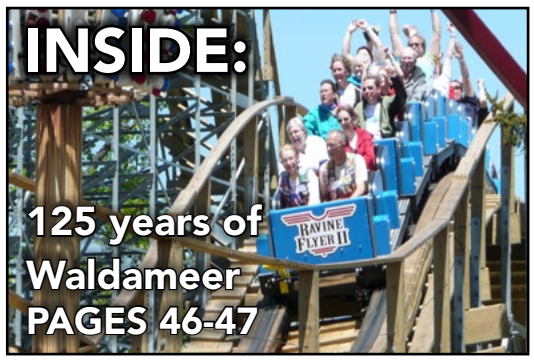
▸Six Flags Fiesta Texas announces record-breaking B&M dive coaster for 2022 — page 10

Amusement TODAY CELEBRATING 25 YEARS!

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Soar America flying high on success at The Island in Pigeon Forge

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — **Dynamic Attractions** has gone proactive and company officials are certainly glad they did take that leap of faith.

That leap actually took them flying high with the new SkyFly: Soar America flying theater that opened this past summer in Tennessee at **The Island in Pigeon Forge**.

"We worked pretty hard on this attraction," said **Guy Nelson**, Dynamic Attraction's executive chair and CEO. "We have made flying theaters all over the world. It was time we made our own. We know what people want. And I think we have now proven that."

The SkyFly: Soar America opened July 9. Dynamic Attractions, with major theme park ride production facilities in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and Orlando, partnered with **Bob McManus** and his son **Clay McManus**, owners of The Island in Pigeon Forge on the project. Clay McManus led the attraction development for the park.

"So far, it is doing really well," Nelson said. "We are really pleased with our partners there, and I believe they are pleased with us."

They plan to celebrate the success there with a grand opening

▸ See SKYFLY, page 6



Theming for the new SkyFly: Soar America flying theater by Dynamic Attractions at The Island in Pigeon Forge, starts on the outside of the building where riders become immersed in the story. The attraction opened July 9.
COURTESY DYNAMIC ATTRACTIONS

Maurer Rides, Carnival open door for roller coaster thrills at sea



Bolt utilizes sleek, Maurer's Spike model stylized two-passenger powered vehicles.
COURTESY CARNIVAL CRUISE LINE

AT: *David Fake*
Special to Amusement Today

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — When **Carnival Cruise Line's** newest ship, *Mardi Gras*, set sail with its first passengers for a pre-maiden voyage on July 31, it made history by doing so with the first-ever "roller coaster at sea" also on board.

The introduction of Bolt, a **Maurer Rides** Spike model motor-powered coaster that towers an fantastic and breathtaking 187 feet above sea level, was postponed multiple times; originally because of ship construction delays, then again on several occasions due to Carnival's operational pause, a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. But with cruises from Florida once again greenlit, the time has finally come for those lucky cruise passengers to experience Bolt.

Carnival gave select guests an opportunity to "sip & sea" *Mardi Gras* in a preview event the day prior to its maiden voyage on July 31. The preview allowed guests to tour staterooms and entertainment venues, sample food and beverages and take the first rides on Bolt.

Guests enjoyed samples from *Mardi Gras*' vast array of restaurants and eateries, including the first seagoing version of Big Chicken by Chief Fun Officer **Shaquille O'Neal**, Emeril's Bistro 1396, the first shipboard restaurant created by famed New Orleans chef **Emeril Lagasse**, and a new international street food venue called Street Eats, along with libations from the new Polynesian-inspired RedFrog Tiki Bar, New Orleans-themed Brass Magnolia and others.

Ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held for the new Rudi's Seagrill developed by celebrated chef **Rudi Sodamin**, the Heroes Tribute Bar with representatives from the military

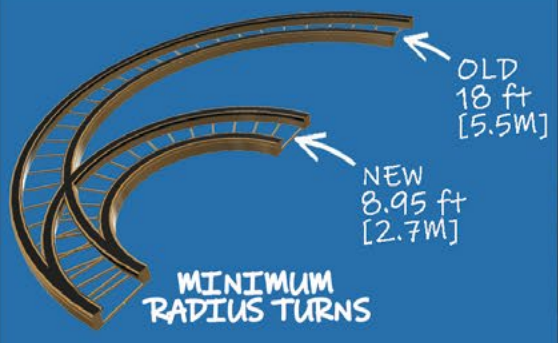
▸ See BOLT, page 8

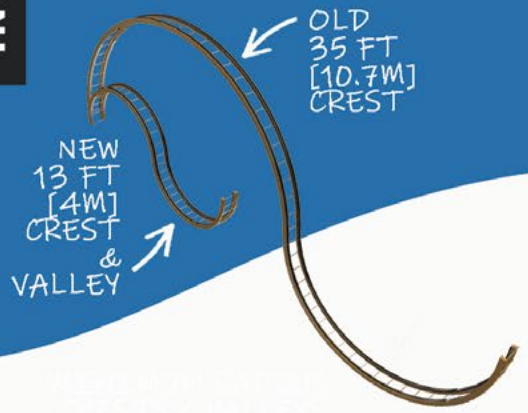
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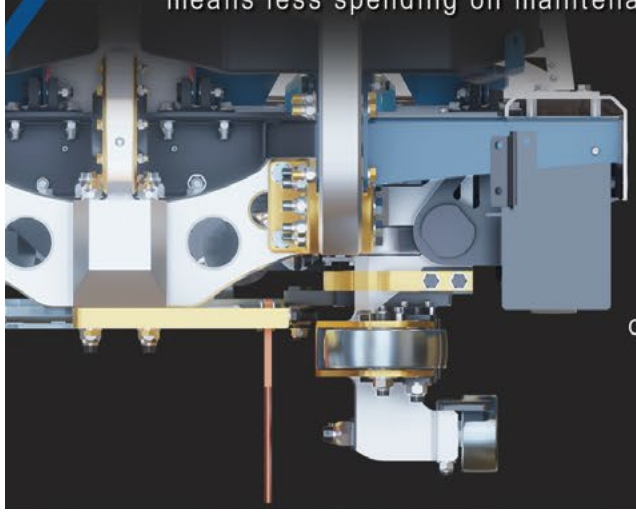
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AMUSEMENT VIEWS

***AT* NOTEBOOK:** *Gary Slade, gslade@amusementtoday.com*

A Texas Press meeting



Slade

It's been more than 25 years since I had attended a Texas Press Association annual meeting, but I was able to do so recently when the association was in the North Texas area.

Having the opportunity to sit in on the seminar scene, it was interesting to see the parallels that trade newspapers and community newspapers have in common.

Both have issues with rising printing costs and the U.S. Postal Service (or as some have said lack there of), as well as trying to keep advertisers and finding the right balance of print/electronic editorial content.

One interesting seminar was on printed obituaries and these interesting takes from that presentation:

•Newspapers are still considered the official record keeper, especially on obituaries, recording in time the persons life story and achievements.

•Unless the person is famous, an inventor or some other special person, the printed obit will be — in many cases — the last time that person will appear in print. As such, it is important to get family history, dates and life facts as correct as possible.

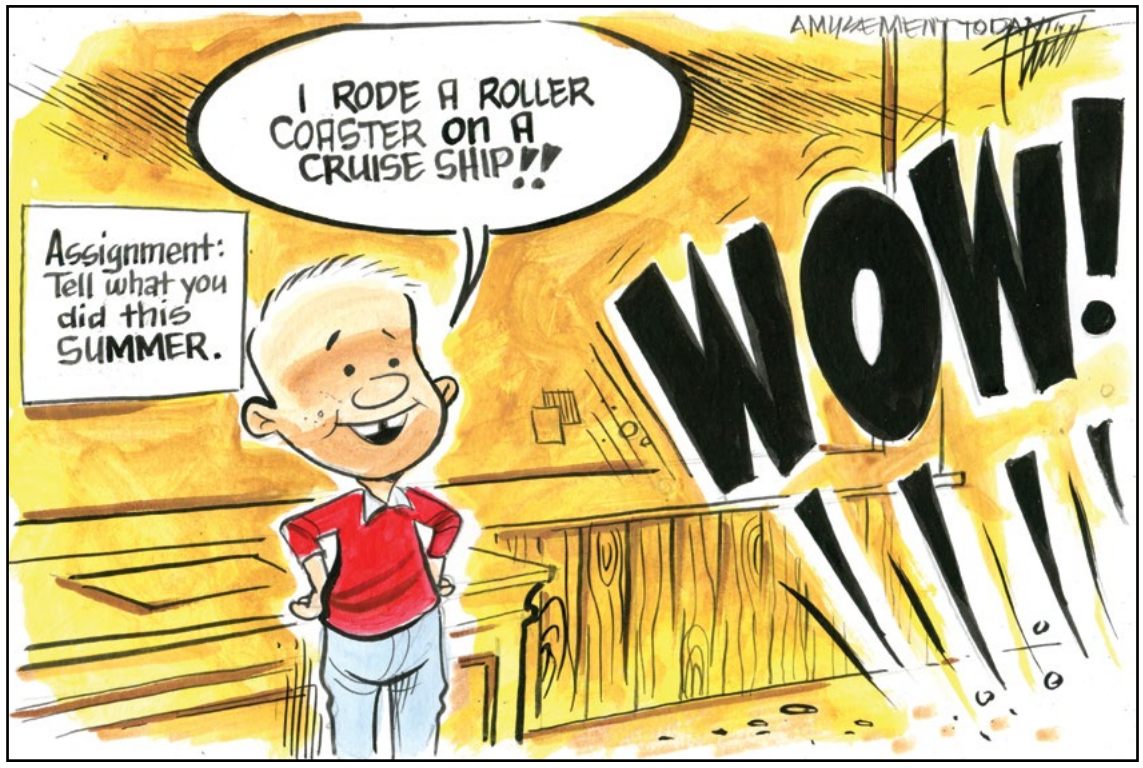
The above statements are true. Since its beginning, *Amusement Today* has tried to produce accurate obits, but as the seminar instructor said, the printed obit is only as good as the information supplied by the family, friends or the funeral home. We hope we have honored all properly in print (as industry record), and in our annual In Memoriam video during the Golden Ticket Awards.

•

Two highlights from the TPA meeting was the association honoring my long-time friend H.V. O'Brien, publisher of *Eastland County Today* with the Frank W. Mayborn Award for Community Leadership. I also learned H.V.'s grandson Levi Freeman got a role in the recently released *Twelve Mighty Orphans* movie, playing the role as team photographer. Congratulations to both!

So if you are in need of a good football movie, go see *Twelve Mighty Orphans*, it's a good Texas-made film based on a true story.

FLINT'S VIEW: *Bubba Flint*



INDUSTRY VOICE: *John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com*

Times change, but the fun never ends



Robinson

On a recent visit to Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, Tennessee, I found myself reflecting on more than 40 years of visits to the area. From a small child on vacation with my family, to a young man trying to understand his father's business, to my own vacations and, most recently, a grown-up getaway in celebration of a birthday ... the reasons for visiting the area have been varied, but the lure of the location has not changed.

However, its attractions and offerings have. I was suprised on this most recent trip to see two of my favorite attractions — one from my childhood days and one from more recent times — had vanished and been replaced by other storefronts. The fun in those locations will forever be captured in my memories, but I'll only be able to share stories of them with my friends and family, but no longer share in the experience.

Change is par for the course with the attractions industry. Technology evolves, audiences demand different entertainment and economic fluctuations can change the game on a moments notice.

What's captivating is that even yesterday's attractions entertain today's generations.

On this most recent visit, while we were journeying between shopping and tastings which led to great laughter and memories of this trip (but would've meant utter boredom for a much younger me), we walked by a popular ride attraction that has been along the Gatlinburg strip for decades. For me, it was cheesy and very lame the first time I rode it, when I was in my early 20s. However, as we strolled by it this year, we could hear kids and families laughing and screaming in thrilled delight as they enjoyed the attraction. A cheesy attraction to us was the ultimate in family thrill for this group of tourists.

Thinking of those kids smiling and laughing brought a smile to my own face. We grow up, our tastes change as do our viewpoints. Even the attractions themselves evolve and disappear. However an attraction rooted in fun and a good time has the chance to be something special for the guests it's geared toward.

The attractions business is the business of memories and experiences. While times change, the point does not. It's all about fun for everyone.

Opinions expressed on this page are those of the columinst(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Janice Witherow

Carrie Boldman, Cedar Point

Carrie Boldman grew up right down the road from **Cedar Point** and worked at the Sandusky, Ohio, amusement park/resort as a seasonal employee. Never in her wildest dreams could she have imagined becoming the first female general manager in the storied park's 150-year history. After spending 16 years working in product and development for **Disney Parks and Resorts**, Carrie returned home to Ohio where she joined the Cedar Point team in 2013 and was appointed general manager in April of this year. Her strategic development, brand management and merchandise expertise, combined with a genuine care for people, passion for her "hometown" park and personal approach to business, make Carrie a natural for her position. Fun fact: her two daughters spend summers working at Cedar Point, just how their mom started in the business!



Growing up not far from Cedar Point, Carrie Boldman began her career as a seasonal employee of the park. After more than a decade of working for Disney, she returned to her roots in 2013 and became a part of the Cedar Point team.
COURTESY CEDAR POINT

Title:
Vice President & General Manager.

Number of years in the industry: 25.

Best thing about the industry:
The people and the experiences we deliver to our guests.

Favorite amusement park ride:
Millennium Force at Cedar Point.

If I wasn't working in the amusement industry, I would be …
Working with the National Parks or enjoying a career in public health.

Biggest challenge facing our industry:
Staying ahead of guest expectations around experience and service.

The thing I like most about amusement/water park season is …
Hearing the rides start up in the morning.

The first thing I do in the morning is …
Count my blessings.

On my commute to work, I usually …
Chat on the phone, hands-free of course!

Least favorite household chore:
Putting the laundry away.

Favorite holiday:
Thanksgiving.

Do you collect anything?
Vintage Chinese checker boards.

The celebrity I would most want to have dinner with is … Oprah or Jimmy Fallon.

Best stress buster: Laughter.

What three things do you always have in the fridge?
Iced tea, cheese and tofu.

It's football season! I cheer for …
The Cleveland Browns!

Favorite tailgate food:
Anything on the grill.

For me, the perfect Sunday is …
A sunny, cool day with nothing on my schedule.

The best advice anyone ever gave to me was …
Be yourself.

At karaoke night, I would sing …
Anything by Diana Ross and the Supremes.

My next vacation will be to …
Hawaii.

Ten years from now I hope to be …
Finishing my quest to visit all National Parks.

It's fall! The best autumn activity is …
Visiting a pumpkin patch, drinking cider, and going to Cedar Point for HalloWeekends.

This always makes me laugh:
Watching my dogs chase each other.

When I say Cedar Point, you say …
FUN!

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Art of attractions



ORLANDO — Chris Gray of Skyline Attractions recently had his modeling skills showcased by SeaWorld Orlando. Replicas based on the park's coasters Kraken and Mako (above) were assembled and painted by Gray using the popular Coaster Dynamix system. Each model represents a 10-day build, which included detailed train painting and modifying of the track to match the park's popular coasters. According to SeaWorld's estimates, the trains on the operating models log about ten miles per day along their modeled tracks. Both models are on display as part of the decor at the Coaster Coffee Company, a coffee shop which opened in the park in May 2020.
COURTESY CHRIS GRAY

Reflections ON FUN



AT: Lottie Minick

Trade show friends

The IAAPA Attractions Expo in Orlando brings together many business associates who've become good friends for life. There are interesting, funny, strange and even scary stories told and experienced during the show. **Sondra Doyle** of **Sureshot Redemption** offered a wonderful remembrance.

In the middle of a very public and contentious divorce, Doyle was exhibiting at an IAAPA Expo in Dallas and was on the floor in a conversation with **Skip Doyle** (her soon-to-be ex-husband) and **Barry Zweben** from *Replay Magazine*. One of the large lights from the very high ceilings crashed really close to her then-husband. He jumped and screamed. Without missing a beat I said, "Just a little to the left, God." Skip Doyle repeats this story every time he introduces Sondra to someone.

A few years after their divorce, Skip Doyle brought a very large band organ to his booth turning the volume as loud as possible. **Paul** and **Michelle Osborne** had the misfortune of being located in the booth next to him. On the second day of the show, the Osbornes would take turns walking over to the **Minick Associates** booth with another creative idea of how to sabotage the organ by lowering the volume or just stopping it. Slowly their sabotage talk turned to Skip Doyle. Finally, **Bob Minnick**, who was friends with Skip, walked over to the loud volumed booth and said, "The Osbornes just gave me this $100 bill to buy a shovel. Turn the organ down, Skip, or there will be blood."

Lottie Minick is a 46-year attractions industry veteran and co-owner of Dallas-based Minick Associates, a design firm founded by her late husband, Bob. Her monthly column features behind-the-scenes anecdotes of her own and from those who have worked in the business.

Got a fun industry story? Email it to Lottie Minick at minickassociates@gmail.com.





Riders in the SkyFly: Soar America flying theater are suspended in front of a 40-foot spherical screen (above left). The ride duration is 10 minutes but with the pre-show, the whole experience lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. Tickets to the SkyFly: Soar America attraction are time controlled to keep the line to a minimum. They can be purchased online or at the site (above right) at The Island in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. COURTESY DYNAMIC ATTRACTIONS

SKYFLY

Continued from page 1

celebration on Sept. 24 at the attraction location.

The fully-themed attraction tells a story that has been described as stirring, whimsical and exhilarating. Guests enter an inventor's workshop, where their anticipation peaks and they board an "airship" to ride above some of the most famous places in the United States.

Nelson said they decided on the airship to take guests on the soaring ride, because they felt it would create a smoother "transport" when riders are being whisked from one side of the country to the other.

The theming starts on the outside of the building and continues inside as riders queue for their turn. There is an extensive pre-show before riders are seated then suspended before a 40-foot spherical screen. The experience comes with movements, sights, smells and a sense of mist. This adventure goes all over the country from New York and Niagara Falls down to the Florida Everglades over to Alaska down to Hawaii and right back to the Smoky Mountains where it began.

"The attraction is powerfully integrated with motion and special effects," Nelson said. "You really do get the sensation of flying."

The whole experience lasts between 30 and 45 minutes, including the 10-minute ride.

Nelson said SkyFly: Soar America took two years to complete from start to finish. The building was constructed by **MBI Companies,** Knoxville, Tennessee. It was designed by **P+A Projects.**

The filming took almost two years as well, Nelson said. And there were certainly challenges with that.

Dynamic Attractions wanted to add a little local flare to the film by allowing guests to get up close and personal to an event at the **Bristol Motor Speedway,** Bristol, Tennessee.

"We were not allowed to actually send in a drone to get real-time footage of the race and the people," Nelson said. "It seems the speedway had had some problems with drones before. So, we had to totally recreate the race with stock footage. It really is very exciting."

Riders feel they are soaring over the track. Then, they begin descending down to the track and going between the cars.

"This is one of the favorite clips," Nelson said.

The music for the movie also has a Tennessee connection. It was produced by Nashvillian **Brian Yessian, Yessian Music**. It was recorded by a 70-piece orchestra drawn from Nashville musicians at the **Ocean Way Nashville Studio.** Award-winning composer **Nathan Padgett** composed the music.

Pulling off the construction, filming, music and everything else that went into the creation of the SkyFly: Soar America had its challenges, but Nelson said they are glad they opened when they did.

"It just seemed at that time everyone was ready to get out and do something," he said.



The Pigeon Forge area draws 11 to 12 million tourists a year. And families are a large part of that, which is exactly the group Dynamic Attractions and The Island in Pigeon Forge wanted to hit with this attraction.

Because of that, Nelson said they were value conscious when setting ticket pricing. Tickets are $22.99 for adults, $17.99 age 11 years and under and $19.99 for seniors.

"We had a family of 10 come in and they rode the ride six times," Nelson said. "I guess they really liked it. "

The attraction is located on the 23-acre entertainment destination adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountain Wheel, a 200-foot observation wheel, and The Island's multi-million dollar show fountain. It is the first flying theater in Tennessee.

Dynamic Attractions is a leader in the design engineering, production and commissioning of iconic, media-based attractions and ride systems.

- **dynamicattractions.com**
- **islandinpigeonforge.com**





Guy Nelson, left, executive chair and CEO, Dynamic Attractions, and Clay McManus, owner (along with his father Bob McManus) of The Island in Pigeon Forge, sealed their partnership with a hand shake. Both parties have been very pleased. They will celebrate with a grand opening celebration on Sept. 24. COURTESY DYNAMIC ATTRACTIONS



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BOLT

Continued from page 1

families support organization **Operation Homefront** with which Carnival partners, and a colorful new floral statue inspired by a young artist at **St. Jude Children's Research Hospital**, the cruise line's longtime charitable cause.

"Today's event was five years in the making and it was simply amazing watching everyone enjoy all that this game-changing ship has to offer — live and in-person!" said **Christine Duffy**, president of Carnival Cruise Line. "Tomorrow is going to be even more exciting as it will be our honor to welcome our first guests on this highly anticipated ship. Our crew is the best in the business, and they are more than ready to provide our guests with the vacation of a lifetime."

The first cruise ship in the Americas powered by liquified natural gas, *Mardi Gras* sails week-long voyages to the eastern and western Caribbean from Port Canaveral every Saturday to San Juan, Puerto Rico; Amber Cove, Dominican Republic; and Nassau, The Bahamas.

The history of this project is as unique as Bolt and the Maurer Spike model itself. Until this model by the German-based ride designer and manufacturer, the existence of such an attraction on a cruise ship was not a possibility. Specifically, Spike's drive system, a motorized rack and pinion design, is what created the opportunity.

Marco Hartwig, Maurer's project manager for Bolt and other similar Spike model installations, explains the challenges that the Spike model eliminates in this way, "Since the movements of the ship are not predictable, you cannot rely on gravity as with conventional roller coasters. Conventional gravity-coasters are not able to cope with the unforeseeable ship motions. If, for example, the ship is moving around its longitudinal or transverse axis, the vehicle may not be able to cope with the next upward section or may become too fast for the next turn. That's why every Spike ride is equipped with a powerful motor and a drive wheel. In addition, a gear rack is attached along the entire track. This patented toothed system allows the electric motor drive force to be transmitted at any point on the rail, even in the tightest curves and even in vertical sections of the track."

Without the need and limitations of gravity or kinetic energy as a forward propellant, height is not necessary to provide the thrills of a traditional roller coaster. Similarly, a long launch section of track to provide room for the acceleration of air and magnetic launches is not needed, since Maurer's drive system creates virtually immediate acceleration.

As for Bolt's ride experience, the 800-foot journey begins with the short acceleration section, right out of the station and is immediately followed by an upward helix and two camelback hills, which provide a spectacular and breathtaking launch above the heads of passengers on the ships top deck and ends with a 180-degree turn around the imposing and iconic Carnival Stack before the vehicles return to the station.

Bolt utilizes sleek, stylized two-passenger vehicles (which almost appear to be the love-child of a jet ski and a Star Wars Speeder Bike) as its means of transport for passengers at speeds up to 45 mph along its diving and twisting blue track. Bolt does not break any speed, length or even height records, but its design is truly groundbreaking.

There will be some who will argue that Bolt and Maurer's entire Spike design is not a roller coaster by its purest definition. However, the ride experience captures the thrilling vertical and lateral forces of a roller coaster, as well as the excitement of speed. The passenger throttle-control similar to that of a jet ski, motorbike or race car, provides a unique ride that passengers of all ages will want to experience again and again.



Marco Hartwig, Maurer's project manager for Bolt and other similar Spike model installations, takes a test ride on Bolt. COURTESY MAURER RIDES

"Passengers can control the vehicle themselves and accelerate it at over 1g. The acceleration is comparable to the start of a Formula 1 car. In addition, the lowest seating position ever achieved on a roller coaster is also a feature. During the ride the rail is between the legs of the guests, who are only secured with a hip belt," says Hartwig.

The environmental conditions on the ship are also completely different to that of a coaster on land. To withstand the salty sea air, the vehicle components were scrutinized for corrosion behavior in advance by means of a salt spray test. This enabled Maurer to identify and eliminate potential weak points.

Additionally, the swell on the high seas leads to deck deformations of the ship and, therefore, additional stresses for the coaster's structure.

Because of the differences between shipbuilding and steel construction tolerances, it was also necessary to assemble and test the complete coaster in advance on land. By doing so, the exact base point coordinates of all supports could be measured and sent to the shipyard to prepare the foundations on the ship.

The Spike concept itself is not new and existed prior to the initial ingenious pitch of the coaster to Carnival over five years ago by Maurer's **Steve Boney**, the Florida-based executive responsible for business development.

Maurer began working on the Spike technology back in 2008 while looking for the next big innovation to tackle. Hartwig said that the results of the initial brainstorming workshops held for this purpose were not very spectacular.

"Roller coasters seemed to have been developed to a large extent with all imaginable ride figures or seat variations. Unique themes like mechanical special effects or the simple 'farther, bigger, faster' did not really offer any starting points for a general development direction," he said.

However, it was a conversation with **TÜV-Süd**, a provider of safety, security and sustainability solutions through testing, certification, auditing and advisory services, which digressed into accidents on summer toboggan runs and a desire for roller coaster safety standards for these products that finally led to the first considerations to develop a controlled, powered coaster. "Because only with this development, did it seem possible to ensure the necessary safety distances between the cars also with interactive rides, i.e., speed controled directly by the passenger," Hartwig explained.

The powered coasters to this point were based on friction wheel drives and therefore could not reach the acceleration and layout possibilities of conventional roller coasters. Powering these kind of vehicles results in extreme wear on wheels as well as the need to distribute the drive force among several drive units, which ultimately leads to additional maintenance costs. In addition, the energy efficiency and the positioning accuracy of friction wheels are less. Upon this realization, Hartwig said Maurer's development goal became suddenly clear, "to combine the performance of roller coasters with the advantages of powered vehicles and to turn it into the first real interactive roller coaster."

Linear motors are the most expensive option and have, so far, only been installed on magnetic lev trains for the entire length of a track. With roller coasters, in addition to the extraordinarily high costs, the twisting layouts can be problematic. Since linear synchronous motors work only on straight lines due to the necessary small distance between the vehicle and rail components of the drive, it can be used at most on very large radii. Even in this application, the efficiencies are well below the Spike drive.

Maurer claims that the Spike drive is the most powerful and economical option and defines the current state of the art for heavy loads for roller coaster vehicles for any layout.

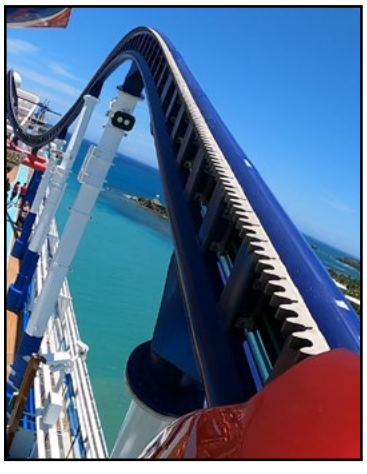
The kinetic energy required for a Spike coaster has no restrictions in the layout design as it is not relevant, also no block sections as with normal roller coasters need to be observed because the safety brakes are integrated in the vehicle itself which creates its own moving block zone. The vehicle is designed for high compression, large uplifting and cross forces. However, one of the few limitations of powered coasters is that since the vehicle can stop at any point in the event of a power failure, slopes should not be steeper than 50 degrees, so that passengers do not have to wait in an uncomfortable position on a slope before continuing.

Compared to conventional gravity-propelled and launch coasters, the Spike model is characterized by the fact that launch acceleration is not only possible once or twice, but always.

The driving experience is therefore completely new and can be extremely intense until the end. Accelerating out of the curve or adding additional power by a guest on a slope has not been able to occur on traditional coasters, yet with the Spike coaster, it is an integral part of every track.

There are currently two Spike installations operating on land: Desmo Race (2019), at Italy's **Mirabilandia** and Sky Dragster (2017) at Germany's **Skyline Park**. A third, unnamed installation is under construction and scheduled to open at China's **Nickelodeon Universe** in 2022.

As project manager of roller coasters, Hartwig says he not only managers the process of creating an amusement ride but is also a "creator of joy." He added, "When I realize roller coaster projects, I always have the future passenger in mind. When the passenger leaves the roller coaster with a smile, my team I and have done everything right. We have to create the feeling that when customers get out of the roller coaster, they want to ride again."





Bolt transports passengers at speeds up to 45 miles-per-hour along its diving and twisting blue track. The ride does not break any speed, length or even height records, but its design is truly groundbreaking. COURTESY CARNIVAL CRUISE LINE, MAURER RIDES

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PARKS, FAIRS & ATTRACTIONS

▸ **Intamin expands Surf Rider line — page 16 / Peppa Pig taking shape at Legoland Florida — page 24**

Dr. Diabolical's Cliffhanger brings 11th coaster to San Antonio theme park

Six Flags Fiesta Texas set to take the plunge with B&M dive coaster

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com



The park states the new dive coaster will contain eight major elements.
COURTESY SIX FLAGS FIESTA TEXAS

SAN ANTONIO — Right in the middle of **Six Flags Fiesta Texas**' 30th anniversary celebration in 2022, the park will debut its 11th coaster, and its third from **Bolliger & Mabillard** (B&M). On July 28, the park announced a year of celebratory events and special efforts to make the anniversary season its best yet, the coaster being the significant addition.

Park visitors have noticed the beginnings of construction, along with some teases from Fiesta Texas to pique interest during the summer season. The announcement of Dr. Diabolical's Cliffhanger revealed all the details of the steepest B&M dive coaster on the planet. As the park continues to push itself in creating story-driven attractions, this new installation — the first B&M dive coaster for the theme park chain — is immersed in a storyline of a duplicitous doctor tempting visitors with promises of eternal youth with her special elixir, only to deceive them and harness their fear and adrenaline with her innovative machine to empower her monsters to terrorize the world.

Park officials were very specific in their selection of elements. The first drop has pushed the boundaries for B&M dive coasters to beyond vertical at 95 degrees. The top speed is 60 mph at the bottom of the drop from 150 feet in the air. The first inversion is an Immelman element followed by a 270-degree zero-G roll. Upon completion of these two upside-down maneuvers, a second near-vertical drop off a block brake plunges riders into an exhilarating second act that features intense elements of a wild banked turn, an extreme airtime hill and a low-to-the-ground spiral. Track length is 2,501 feet.

"It has been an absolutely fun and pleasurable journey designing a ride of this magnitude during a worldwide pandemic," said Park President **Jeffrey Siebert**. "The passion and enthusiasm of **Sophie Bolliger** and her team along with **Larry Chikola** and our team and the enthusiasm they have brought to the ride experience — everyone just truly got into it. '[We asked] what could it do that was completely different? How could we take it to the next level and make it feel totally different than any other dive coaster on Planet Earth?' We had so much fun along the way."

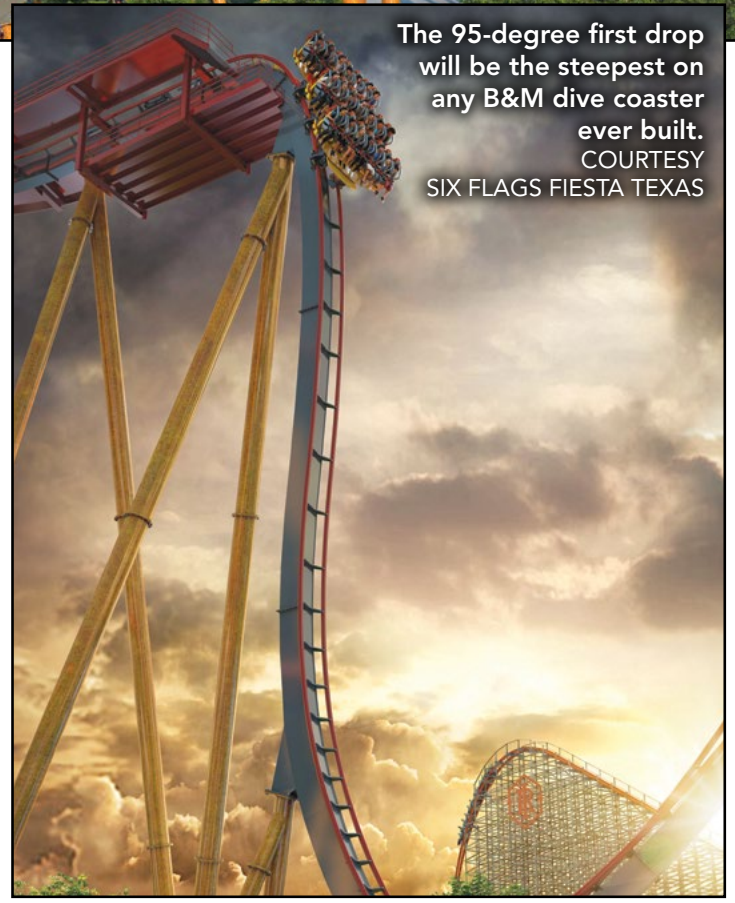
Siebert said the project began in earnest in 2019.

"There were conversations about every inch of the ride," Siebert told *Amusement Today*. "For example, the wild banked turn offers a little lateral to it rather than just heartline, which offers a different dynamic experience. It's also lower to the ground and keeps the speed and excitement and forces; you are going to feel more thrill to it."

The ride will operate with three, 21-passenger trains. However, the park has purchased four so that when one train is undergoing routine maintenance, Cliffhanger will continue three-train operation year round. The trains will feature vest restraints instead of over-the-shoulder harnesses.

"We're very proud to be working with B&M on this project," said **Chris Ozimek**, director of marketing. "Like many manufacturers, they provide a great, quality ride. We felt they were the right fit to be a big

▸ **See FIESTA, page 11**



The 95-degree first drop will be the steepest on any B&M dive coaster ever built.
COURTESY SIX FLAGS FIESTA TEXAS

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FIESTA

Continued from page 10

part of our anniversary celebration. They were very flexible in making something very unique for us. They made a lot of changes in how they built the trains. The partnership has been great."

"B&M was able to redesign the trains so that they could fold in on themselves tighter to make really tight turns," said Siebert.

With that design, the park had an option for six-across seating or seven, and they opted for seven for the additional capacity.

Despite the name Cliffhanger, the ride will not physically utilize the park's quarry cliff wall. In addition to the challenges of working with cliff terrain, Siebert feels the site selection is on-point.

"It will look huge and large in this perfect location," he said. "As you know, the quarry would make it look smaller and not as accessible for guest interaction like our final configuration. The ride is perfectly placed and sighted."

"There is not another dive coaster within a thousand miles of this one," said Ozimek. "It's going to draw people from beyond Texas."

The ride will surround a new plaza area so that guests waiting to ride will have action soaring all around them. To create this space, the Sundance Theater, an outdoor venue, has been retired. However, the backstage area will be repurposed to include an indoor portion of the queue. Siebert noted that not all surprises have been revealed. What happens inside is being held secret but will further the storyline.

It was confirmed that the rest of the queue would be covered and fanned. Thematic elements will bring guests into the tale. "The thematic detailing and the relevance of the Dr. Diabolical plotline will really pay off," said Siebert.



The 270-degree zero-G roll is one of two upside-down moments on Dr. Diabolical's Cliffhanger.
COURTESY SIX FLAGS FIESTA TEXAS

The character of Dr. Diabolical will also become a figure within the park.

"We didn't consciously choose to make [the character] a woman, it just naturally went that direction," said Ozimek. "It's a character we can own who becomes a part of our park, such as her starring in our Halloween spectacular, Monster Mash Bash. There's more to the story to be told."

The introduction of Dr. Diabolical's Cliffhanger will create an entirely new plaza within the area of the park. New seating for dining and relaxing, a new stage and an anniversary walkway, which will allow guests and longtime fans to purchase special bricks inscribed with messages.

In addition to the spectacular new coaster in the heart of Crackaxle Canyon, the park is excited about a yearlong celebration. When the full Mardi Gras festival returns next February, a 30th anniversary float will be incorporated into the parade. In addition to anniversary-enhanced versions of the park's seasonal events, other components of the 30th extravaganza begin January 1. Special touches include mini-museum exhibits in each park section, collectable buttons, throwback shows, food festivals, a Celebrate 30 fireworks show, then-and-now displays and more.

"It's the entire year, and it kicks off right at midnight on New Year's Eve," said Ozimek. "We're incorporating this 30th anniversary into everything we do."



Denmark's largest, fastest coaster to speed into Fårup Sommerland

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JUTLAND, Denmark — Expecting to debut in April of 2022, Fønix will rise above **Fårup Sommerland** with some nifty bragging rights. Manufactured by **Vekoma**, it will be the tallest and fastest roller coaster in the country.

Niels Jørgen Jensen, CEO of Fårup Sommerland, said, "We are extremely proud to finally unveil our plans to develop and build Denmark's largest and fastest roller coaster, which will be ready for our guests next year. We've been working on it for a long time, and I look forward to seeing our guests enjoying what it has to offer."

Standing at 40 meters (131 feet) tall and stretching 905 meters (almost 3,000 feet) in length, Fønix will conquer the records in Denmark. Top speed is 59 mph.

More notably, the new roller coaster will feature a first-of-its-kind element. What the park terms as a "stall loop" will be the first of three inversions. The nature of the maneuver is to provide negative G-forces while traveling upside down. A heartline roll and a corkscrew through a building will be two other dynamic inversions.



The "stall loop" is a new inversion from Vekoma. COURTESY FÅRUP SOMMERLAND

"The stall loop is a world-first element," said **Benjamin Bloemendaal**, concept engineer, Vekoma. "In this new element the train is turned upside down by half a loop followed by an inverted parabolic arc where the riders experience a period of 2.5 seconds of hangtime before entering into the second half of the loop combined with a vertical twist."

Fårup Sommerland had turned to Vekoma when it installed Orkanen, a popular suspended coaster, in 2013 and Saven in 2020. That family coaster was praised for its smoothness and fun layout. Now Vekoma is upping the stakes when it comes to providing bigger thrills for the park.

"We both were discussing a new addition to the park already in 2018," said **Stefan Holtman**, sales manager, Vekoma. "After the success of Orkanen, something else was needed. After a mutual trip to **Legendia Park** in Poland, the owners of the park fell immediately in love with the Lech coaster there. As Fårup Sommerland is a typical family park, we were concerned that this ride would a bit too intense for their target group. Therefore, we had to work on a less intense version focusing more on airtime and less on positive forces. This is how Fønix was born. As this design only existed as a concept and all engineering work still had to be done, the earliest date of opening could be 2021. This would have been eight years after the launch of Orkanen and we all felt that this was too long. Then we came with the solution of launching an intermediate ride at opening 2020 followed by the big thrill ride in 2022. This was the birth of Saven, the first out-and-back Family Boomerang in the world which turned into a great success for Fårup and being the perfect step up to the launch of the record-breaking coaster in 2022."

According to management, there are 14 distinct elements on the ride which will include drops, inversions and moments of airtime.

"The station fly-through corkscrew is a unique ride element that reflects a disorienting near-miss, on-ride sensation. It's an exciting interaction with the guests in the station where they see the train flip-over their heads at a speed of 60km/h," Bloemendaal told *Amusement Today*.

At almost DKK 100 million ($15.9 million), Fønix is the largest investment in Fårup Sommerland's 46-year history.

"The tourism industry has been hit hard by the pandemic," said Jensen. "It's extremely important for big tourism players like ourselves to invest in new and exciting attractions. This will ultimately create long-term competitive advantages, which will ultimately push the industry back on to safer ground during and after the pandemic."



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European flood waters cause extreme damage to Walibi Belgium

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WAVRE, Belgium — Information on the devastating floods wreaking havoc across Europe took global news by storm in mid-July. Numerous countries were affected, and the damage to infrastructure and homes was nothing short of catastrophic. When the death count across the continent continued to rise well above 200 lives lost, the hearts of people from around the world were sorrowful.

Belgian Minister of Home Affairs **Annelies Verlinden** described the horrific events as "one of the greatest natural disasters our country has ever known."

Like many businesses, the amusement industry was affected in the aftermath. **Walibi Belgium** was hit particularly hard.

"The park, which is quite on a globally flat area, has been completely flooded with a height between 0.8 to 1.2 meters high (two and a half to four feet)," said **Alexis Nuyt**, chief marketing officer. "The biggest coasters have been damaged. Most of the motors were under the water, along with most of the electric cabin and lots of electronic devices and installations. As an example, one of our most popular rides, the family-coaster, Calamity Mine, has 14 motors. All were flooded. This means we have to dismantle, dry, replace some parts, reassemble, then finally test it. Some trains were also flooded and must be repaired."

Kondaa, the parks newest and largest coaster, provided by **Intamin**, had just made its debut less than two months prior to the flood.

"Our offices have been flooded as well, meaning all the ground floor must be dried; all wooden-base furniture has to be replaced, as well as the floor," said Nuyt.

When the rains and flooding began to take their toll, no one expected the severity of the storms to impact the park, as well as the region, as intensely as they did.

"We decided to close the park around 2 p.m. as the water was rising, but at the time considered it as a short-term issue," noted Nuyt. "A few hours later, we were thinking we could reopen the park during the weekend after a deep cleaning. Unfortunately, the water still continued to rise quicker and quicker, and during the night between Thursday to Friday, the water lever was at its highest. On Friday, water was still everywhere in the park. The water also got into the technical area of **Aqualibi**, our water park. As all technical installation are located under the site, [that site had] more than two meters of water."



Theming for the new coaster, Kondaa, can be seen overtaken with flood waters. COURTESY WALIBI

Any hopes of reopening the park quickly were soon dashed with the severity of the damage. The park has planned a reopening date of October 2, with plans for the water park still unknown.

"Once the water left the site, our team and an external specialized company on damage rescue started to decontaminate, clean, dismantle and remove all damaged parts and pieces," Nuyt told *Amusement Today*. "We are doing strong and continuous effort to work as quickly as possible on all technical [issues] which need to be rebuilt or repaired. Fortunately, real estate (building, decoration, green areas) seem not that much affected by the flooding. Our biggest challenge remains clearly on a technical level."

Horrific as the damage was, park officials know surrounding homes and business were completely destroyed, causing area deaths and more than a thousand people needing to relocate because of damage to their homes.

"Fortunately, nobody in our team was injured and, of course, no visitors as well," said Nuyt. "From our side, it is 'only'—even huge, however — material damage. We, of course, think of the members of our seasonal staff who had to stop working with the closure of the park. We know this is not an easy situation, even more so after a year of the corona crisis."

While Walibi Belgium took the biggest brunt of the storm, other properties were affected to a certain degree. **Plopsa Coo** was heavily flooded but was able to reopen a week later. Damage at other regional leisure destinations included **Jardins d'Annevoie** and **Grottes de Han**. Most have since reopened.

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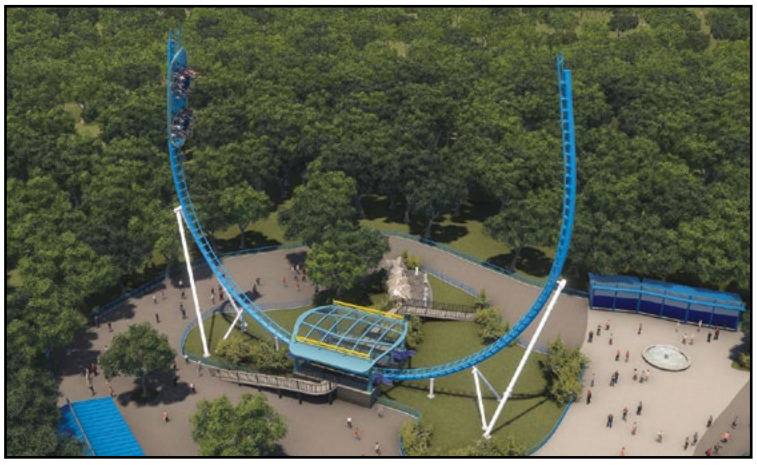
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All event photos are from 2019.

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Intamin expands the Surf Rider into larger family of coasters



The Surf Rider 30 and 40 feature a U-shaped track (above). Timed splash effects can interact with both riders and spectators (below). COURTESY INTAMIN





AT: *Tim Baldwin*
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SCHAAN, Lichtenstein — In 2007, **Intamin Amusement Rides** introduced its first Surf Rider installation at **Wet'n'Wild Waterpark** in Australia. Shortly thereafter, North America's first version debuted inside the **Mall of America** at **Nickelodeon Universe** in 2008. There it was called Avatar's Airbender.

The look of the ride prompted many coaster purists to debate whether the fun ride was an actual coaster. With its linear-synchronous-motor launch and gravity-driven drop, the consensus was yes. The ride stood at 20 meters/70 feet and consisted of a U-shaped track and a surfboard style of vehicle. The car sported two round seating configurations that rotated during the course of the ride depending on weight. Six passengers sat in a circle on both gondolas making for a total of 12 riders.

The ride continued to sell to parks around the world, including three Disney parks. At the Disney parks, the vehicle was changed to a car seating 20 passengers in organized rows.

Now Intamin has evolved the product into a new family of Surf Rider coasters. With these new developments, the rotating carriages have been expanded to 10 each, making for a ride complement of 20 passengers each cycle.

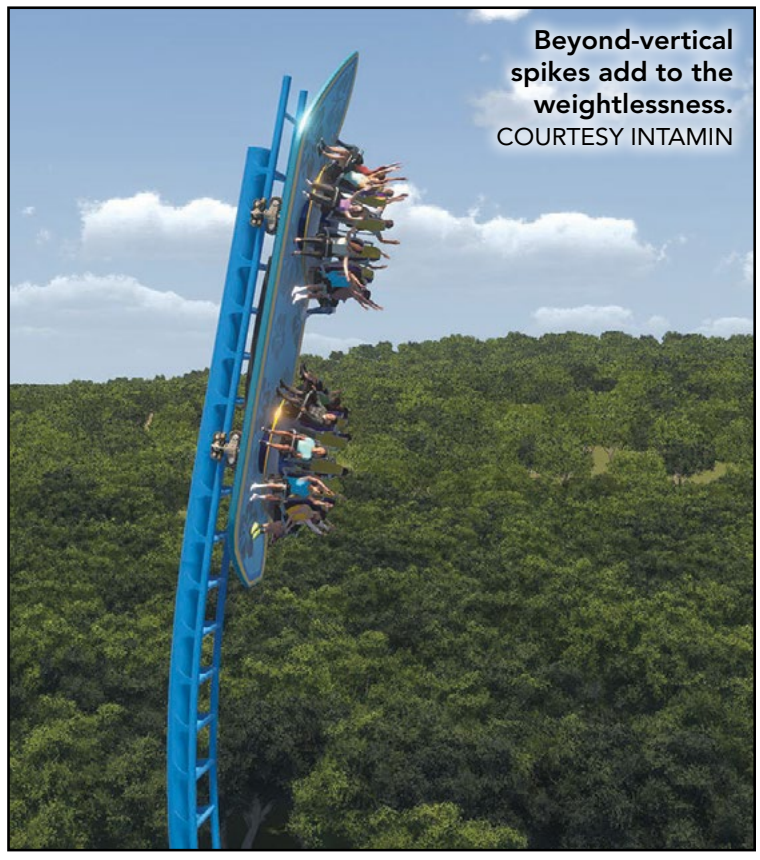
In addition to the increased capacity, Intamin officials state: "Due to the use of cutting-edge lightweight construction methods and materials, we were also able to substantially reduce the weight of the moving masses at the same time."

More riders is only the beginning. Now with a Surf Rider "family," clients have many more options. A Surf Rider 30 or Surf Rider 40 stand at 30 meters and 40 meters, respectively. Intamin also offers the option of a controlled spin incitation that can guarantee fun rotation.

Surfing back and forth, the ride cycle delivers 12 moments of weightlessness, with guests being situated in different positions throughout the ride. The U-shaped track now features beyond-vertical spikes. Intamin officials feel the ride is suited to both indoor or outdoor settings and any size or type of park. The compact footprint is a big advantage for parks looking for a bigth-rill in a tight space.

Bigger yet is the Ultra Surf. With a longer stretch of 180 meters/590 feet, the track is traversed back and forth until riders have experienced a combined length of 200 meters, close to 2,000 feet of track. The "surf" is taken to a new level with the introduction of a retaining pool. While the vehicle never physically touches the water, timed jets create splash effects or a vortex tunnel of water in which the surfboard-style vehicle zips through. The wave effect can shoot straight up or outward into a spectator area — or both! The timed fountain patterns let a park control the degree of how wet the riders will get.

Regarding which model a customer might choose, Intamin says in a statement: "They're packed — and we really mean packed — with weightlessness and airtime moments."



Beyond-vertical spikes add to the weightlessness. COURTESY INTAMIN



The length of the Ultra Surf's track is 180 meters, but the combined length of experienced travel is close to 600 meters with the back-and-forth passes. COURTESY INTAMIN

Park Post-its



AT: Pam Sherborne
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Seabreeze Amusement Park, located in Irondequoit, New York, a suburb of Rochester, was honored with a New York State Senate Empire Award.

The award was presented by State Senator **Samra Brouk** and State Assembly member **Sarah Clark,** in honor of the park's iconic Jack Rabbit roller coaster and the park's 143 years in the community.

Park President **Rob Norris** was honored by the award and is proud of the role Seabreeze has played in the community.

This year is the Jack Rabbit's 101st anniversary. The award was set to be given last year for the 100th anniversary, but was postponed due to the pandemic.

•

Christmas is already in the air at the U.K.'s **Alton Towers.** Officials there revealed plans for a brand-new interactive and immersive light experience and a wonderfully traditional Christmas market, as well as the return of the family favorite, Santa's Sleepover.

The event will run Nov. 27 to Dec. 23.

For the first time ever, the resort will open for day guests and present two brand new seasonal celebrations, creating magical memories, festive fun and an unforgettable Christmas with friends and family. New for 2021, Alton Towers Resort is set to sparkle as it partners with Lightopia to host the U.K.'s biggest light and lantern festival.

The theme will be "Sense of Seasons," a magical and immersive journey, which will take guests through the four seasons with spectacular lanterns, stunning light installations, a magnificent water show and color transformations.

There also will be over 60 Christmas market stalls for guests to explore. From unique crafts, festive food, mulled drinks and more delightful surprises, guests can enjoy some Christmas shopping and revel in the twinkling lights, charming local stalls and fabulous feel-good festive atmosphere.

•

The Ferris wheel at **Tuscora Park**, New Philadelphia, Ohio, won't be operating this year as the vintage amusement park ride undergoes needed maintenance work and upgrades to meet stringent new state requirements.

The 1926 **C.W. Parker** Ferris wheel needs hydraulic and mechanical upgrades to improve the ride's ability to stay in operation with less downtime and less loading restraints caused by the age of the equipment.

According to a story that ran in the area's local *The Times-Reporter*, this maintenance project was the first part of the wheel project.

"We've decided since we've got it all apart, let's look at every part," said **Greg Rees**, a member of the board of **RTY**, which oversees operation of the rides at the park.

Much of the work has already been done, with donations of parts and labor from **Gradall Industries** and **Dover Hydraulics** covering the majority of the cost.

The second part of the project will involve an engineer coming to the site and looking at the gondolas on the ride, including any specks of rust where the aluminum is touching the steel.

Inspectors don't want to see any thinning of structural materials that would add to safety issues, Rees said.

The story also stated that **Dover Tank and Plate** will be the overseer of the project. Their professional engineer will come out and look at the Ferris wheel and any issues that need addressed. The engineer will decide how to fix those issues.

The company will take care of the structure, blast it and repaint it. Then the gondola cars will need to come apart, be blasted, looked at and any repairs made.

Once all of that work is done, the lighting system on the Ferris wheel will be replaced with current LED technology.

•

The **Nashville Zoo**, Nashville, Tennessee, is beginning a major African Safari expansion.

Rick Schwartz, the zoo's president and CEO, said the expansion will immerse guests into what it feels like to be on a real safari. There will be no visual barriers allowing guests to feel very close to the animals.

The expansion will add 40 acres to the park. Once completed, Nashville Zoo will become the ninth largest in the country at 188 acres.

Included in the expansion will be a 12-minute boat ride that takes guests across the exhibit to see the animals in a different light, a walking path, a restaurant and lodge with lots of different views, and a chance to feed the giraffes.

Animal sightings will include not only giraffes, but also hippos, cranes, storks, hyenas, cheetahs and more.

There will be a lot of backstage tours with some glamping tents where families can come, stay and have a traditional African barbecue.

Construction of the expansion will be done in five different phases. Depending on funding, it could take five to 10 years for completion.

•

Give Kids the World Village, Kissimmee, Florida, is bringing back its holiday lights spectacular, Night of a Million Lights, with some new additions. The nighttime event, which debuted last year during the resort's closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will run Nov. 12 through Jan. 2, 2022.

During the event, Give Kids the World Village will transform into a winter wonderland of lights and holiday decorations. Night of a Million Lights will feature a 360-degree dancing lights show, a sparkling tree trail, larger-than-life holiday displays, photo ops at one-of-a kind step-in frames and backdrops, a holiday marketplace with visits from Santa and a guided tram tour.

New this year, a variety of VIP packages will be available, including dessert parties, behind-the-scenes tours and more.

Night of a Million Lights will run from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., with staggered entry times to prevent crowding. All visitors will be required to follow safety protocols and posted instructions. Proceeds from the event will benefit Give Kids the World, which provides critically-ill children and their families with week-long wish vacations at no cost.

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Storyland Studios designing Storyville Gardens for Nashville area

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Active discussions have been in progress with both private landowners and local governments in Middle Tennessee to secure a site location for the new theme park headed to the greater Nashville area.

The park, called **Storyville Gardens**, will be an interactive, story-driven theme park with a mission to inspire a renewed love for reading that transcends basic classroom requirements. Its rides, attractions and shows will be based on stories from the four corners of the globe including Asia, Africa, Europe and America.

The project announcement was made mid-summer by **Guerrier Development,** developer of the project, and **Storyland Studios**, the design company selected for the theme park.

Guerrier Development was searching for about 130 acres near Nashville to turn it into a family destination. Included in the plans are not only Storyville Gardens, but also entertainment, retail and dining facilities and three hotels.



Developers have been looking for 130 acres in the greater Nashville area to not only build the park but also create a destination with entertainment, retail and dining facilities and three hotels. COURTESY STORYLAND STUDIOS

DeLisa and **Elde Guerrier**, of the development company, both feel that family-friendly entertainment options are lacking in Nashville and the surrounding counties.

"Storyville Gardens will provide that option while also helping parents and caregivers instill a love of reading for their children," DeLisa Guerrier said at the June announcement.

Storyland Studios, with offices in the U.S. and Europe, is excited about the project.

"We want to create an unforgettable experience that ignites an insatiable love of reading and story in the next generation of children," said **Ben Thompson,** chief strategy officer and head of global clients at Storyland Studios.

The park will feature a combination of traditional show-based entertainment and cutting-edge technological innovations to create an "edutainment" experience for all ages.

"The potential for Storyville Gardens is limitless, both in terms of its ability to become a global attraction as well as its expected impact on children and families that will embrace reading and stories through world-class, experiential attractions," said **Mel McGowan**, Storyland Studios founder and chief creative officer. "The theme park industry will have never seen a park quite like this one. Tennessee families and tourists to the region are in for an experience they won't be able to get anywhere else."

Founded and staffed by veteran **Walt Disney Imagineers** and an array of talented designers, architects, artisans, and storytellers, Storyland Studios brings a wealth of expertise in themed entertainment and visitor attractions to the Storyville Gardens project. Storyland has lent its magic to a variety of iconic properties, including **Disney, Universal Studios, Marvel, Lucasfilm, Legoland, Cedar Fair** and more.

Through a three-dimensional storytelling process that will include spatial, strategic and interactive disciplines, the Storyland team will create the plot, setting and character of Storyville. The layered and immersive environment will involve every aspect of the park. Visitors will become involved the moment they pass through the entrance gates.

"Our aim is to create a realistic, detailed spatial experience down to the smallest detail," Thompson said. "We want visitors to feel as though they're truly leaving behind the world they know and entering a whole new realm of imagination and possibility."

Elde Guerrier said they have been pleased with the excitement and energy surrounding the announcement of Storyville Gardens.

"We are looking forward to delivering it to the region," he said.

An announcement of the site selection is expected by the end of 2021. Construction is slated to begin in mid-2022.

- **storylandstudios.com**
- **storyvillegardens.com**



A new theme park, Storyville Gardens, is coming to Tennessee. Guerrier Development, Nashville, Tennessee, a multi-disciplined real estate development and investment firm with expertise in community building and hospitality, is the developer of the project. Storyland Studios, with offices in the U.S. and Europe, have been selected to design the theme park. COURTESY STORYLAND STUDIOS



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Six Flags Over Texas announces a second attraction for 2022

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

ARLINGTON, Texas — On the park's 60th birthday, **Six Flags Over Texas** announced a second ride coming to the park in 2022.

The long-in-the-works Aquaman Power Dive has seen new developments in upgrading the attraction. Originally purchased as a one-boat operation, changes are currently being implemented to make the **Mack Rides** Power Splash a two-unit operation with the inclusion of a turntable.

Now, Aquaman will have company. A lot actually. Pirates of Speelunker Cave was announced to gathered fans, media, park staff and more to huge cheers. Dating back to 1964, the original dark ride was called The Cave, and became more lovingly known as Speelunkers Cave. Speelunkers were underground creatures created exclusively for Six Flags Over Texas. The float-through attraction was built by Arrow Development and delighted guests up through the 1991 season. In 1992, the ride was rethemed with a Looney Tunes overlay and rebranded as Yosemite Sam and the Gold River Adventure. That attraction entertained guests through 2018.

During the fall of that year, harsh flooding hit the park and caused lower levels at the back end to sustain damage. The park quickly reopened, but the indoor dark ride had welcomed its last passengers.

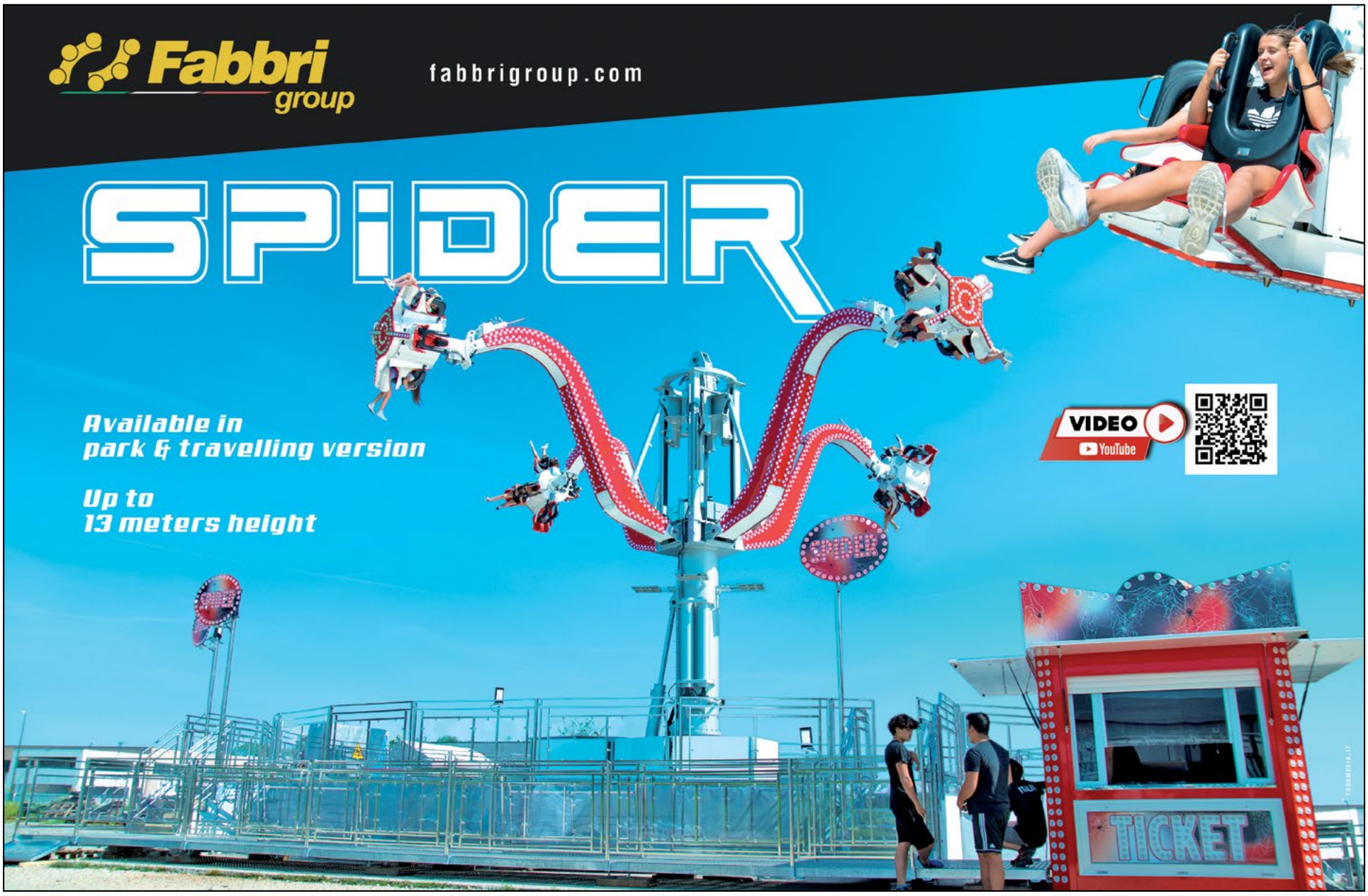
Aware of its dormancy behind park walls, fans were not only enthusiastic to hear of its reopening but that Speelunkers were returning.



Pirates burst onto the scene to take over Six Flags' announcement of a second ride for 2022.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

"We had redone the dark ride in San Antonio," said Park President **Ron McKenzie**. "When I first got here [September of 2020], I asked for a tour of the facility. When I got into the cave, I thought, 'This is usable. The scenic work and the animatronics were still functional, but we knew we couldn't do a Looney Tunes execution in a short amount of time. We contacted **Jacob Dell** of **Magic In The Sky**,

▸ **See PIRATES, page 22**

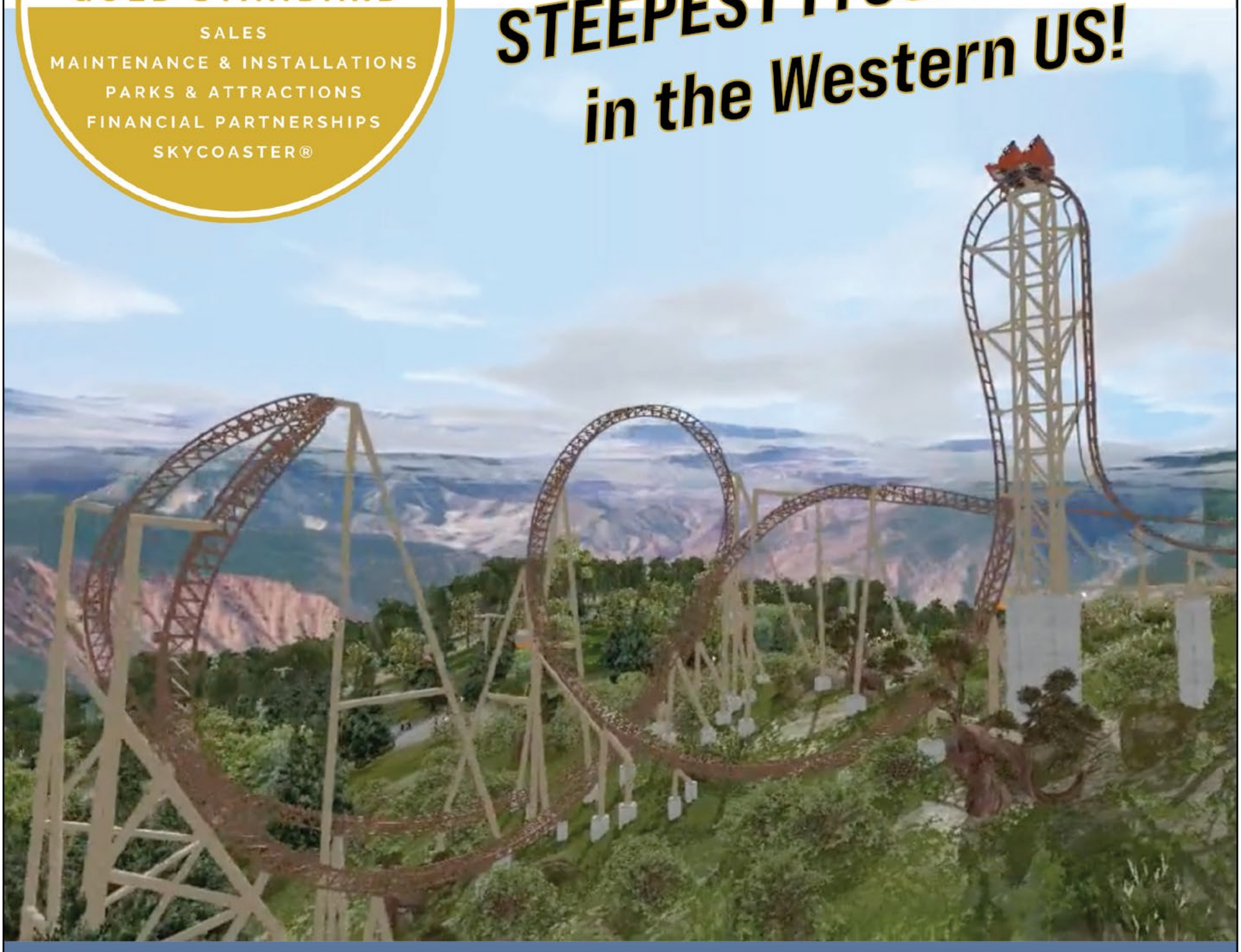


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PIRATES

Continued from page 20

who helped us with [the relaunch] of Casa Magnetica and Pirates of the Deep Sea in San Antonio."

The reimagined ride will use a new conveyor loading system to accommodate continuous boarding of the 26, six-passenger boats.

Through the journey, riders will encounter 17 scenes which will feature state-of-the-art animatronics; cinema-style, wide projection technology; and physical sets.

"I didn't want to do the same thing as we did in San Antonio," said McKenzie. "We got the green light in early June. That gave me some time to think about how we could make the ride more authentic to Six Flags Over Texas and pay homage to what that ride had been."

Park officials have stated the return of the Speelunkers has been a continuous request. In other throwback touches, a few scenes have been named Skull Island, Big Bend and Port La Salle, all inspired by attractions from the past.

"We took the premise and gave a twist on the storytelling by adding the Speelunkers to every scene," said McKenzie. "The story is the cave has been dormant, and in that time the pirates have taken over, and it is up to [the guests] to help the Speelunkers reclaim the lost treasure of the cave."

The park states that the ride will open early in 2022. If McKenzie has his way — and everything goes smoothly — he aims for Pirates of Speelunker Cave to be the first new ride of 2022 to open.

"We are going through the renderings and tweaking the storyline. In the meantime, the ride is structurally in good shape, and our maintenance team is in there taking out the stuff that won't be used in this execution," said McKenzie.

The logo has been well received with some fans noting the Speelunker characters within the eyes of the skull.

"What better way to celebrate our park's 60th anniversary than announcing a new attraction that pays homage to our past and launches us into the future," said McKenzie.







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Industry gathers again for 2021 Amusement Expo in Las Vegas

AT: *John W.C. Robinson*
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

LAS VEGAS — Any lingering concerns about how fast and fully the out-of-home entertainment industry would rebound coming out of COVID-19 were dismissed at the outset of the 2021 Amusement Expo International (AEI) in Las Vegas, when attendees and exhibitors showed up in solid numbers and in a high-energy, upbeat mood for the event held June 29 to July 1, 2021.

Preliminary attendance statistics revealed the number of buyers was up from 2020's event in New Orleans. That event was one of the final ones held in the industry prior to COVID-19 causing nationwide shutdowns and stay-at-home orders.

Data from AEI's opening day showed 1,438 buyers registered, up from 1,303 in 2020. The number of exhibiting companies was down slightly from the previous AEI, at 132 compared to 145 in spring 2020. The dip was partially due to travel restrictions imposed on international companies. Impressively, 35 new exhibitors were part of this year's AEI.



The 2021 Attractions Expo showfloor (above) showcased new products, games and other industry staples. Its aisles were populated throughout the event. Stern Pinball's Pinball Alley was slimmed down slightly from previous years, but remained a popular exhibit with attendees (inset). AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

"Even though our numbers were trending positively in the days and weeks before the show, I was still a bit surprised and quite happy with the turnout on the exhibit floor and during our education program," said **Joe Camarota**, president of the A**merican Amusement Machine Association** (AAMA), one of the event's sponsoring organizations.

The event launched with a keynote speech by former U.S. soldier **John Kriesel**, which set a celebratory tone for the event reflecting the consensus view that the industry is back.

"It was just what we needed to give us some momentum for the rest of this year and into 2022," said **Greg Trent**, president of **Amusement and Music Operators Association** (AMOA), the event's other sponsoring trade group. "There were certainly moments when prospects for a 2021 AEI looked pretty bleak, but moving it to the summer slot proved to be a wise decision."

On Tuesday, June 29, over 400 persons attended the day-long educational program. In addition to the 25 sessions for the amusement/FEC side of the market, there were separate programs running concurrently that were focused on bulk vending and virtual reality topics.

That evening, the All-Industry Gala served as a much-anticipated reunion for AEI attendees and exhibitors. Predictably, it was one of the highest-attended and most festive AEI parties

▸ **See EXPO, page 25**









The representatives from Embed welcomed industry friends and clients at their booth during the expo (above left). Childhood intellectual properties such as Hot Wheels and Twister were reimagined as arcade games at the Adrenaline Amusements exhibit (above middle). Lisa Cummings and Annie Shugart of McGowan Allied Insurance were eager to greet 2021 Amusement Expo attendees and were all smiles at the return of in-person events (above right).
AT/JOHN W.C. ROBINSON

EXPO

Continued from page 24

in recent years. Gala sponsors included **TouchTunes**, **Incredible Technologies**, **Firestone Financial**, **SpringboardVR** and **Frontgrid**.

The AEI exhibition opened on Wednesday, June 30, to high traffic and optimism about prospects for the future. Colocation partners **National Bulk Vendors Association**, **Laser Tag Museum** and the virtual reality segments once again joined together with AEI to create expanded opportunities for their respective buyer and seller bases.

Despite the uncertainty in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, many exhibitors and buyers expressed satisfaction with the results of this year's Expo. It was business as usual on the show floor, with new products being introduced to the trade for the first time, equipment orders being placed and sales leads and new customer contacts being generated.

"We were really pleased with the exhibit floor," said **Andrew Parrow** of Semnox Solutions. "We had a very consistent flow and nice foot traffic."

The education program also came through by delivering some well-timed guidance and information to an audience hungry for new ideas and approaches. And, of course, most were thrilled to simply be together and reconnected at their annual business event after a 15-month interruption in industry interaction.

Cashless technology supplier **Embed** returned not just as an exhibitor at Amusement Expo International 2021 but also as a representative of the FEC sector. The Embed team was excited to meet with buyers and exhibitors alike at the company's booth.

Supporting customers in the road to recovery, focusing on low-touch experiences and embracing automation, Embed representatives were on-site exhibiting and demoing the industry's award-winning transformative technology: The Mobile Wallet which Embed gave away free to all business owners since the beginning of the pandemic.

"We were extremely excited to meet up with new and existing customers, partners and friends, face-to-face for the first time since the pandemic outbreak and to know that the Embed COVID-19 Relief Act has helped many businesses thrive during the pandemic," said **John Keys**, strategic accounts manager. "We look forward to continuing to empower, enable, and ease the business of fun for our customers as they begin a new chapter in the industry's post-pandemic recovery."

The next AEI is less than nine months from now, with the 2022 version set to return to the event's normal spring dates on March 15-17, 2022, at Westgate Las Vegas and the South Hall 1 of the **Las Vegas Convention Center**.

•amusementexpo.org



Altitude Rides and Attractions introduces interactive Hammered

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com







A new double Soaring Eagle finds a beautiful setting at the Cleveland Zoo (above left). On Hammered, riders are shot up 30 feet either in an automatic mode or in an interactive game where a challenger uses a classic midway mallet to strike them higher (at right). COURTESY CLEVELAND ZOO, STARLAND

HANOVER, Mass. — Formerly known as **Soaring Eagle**, **Altitude Rides and Attractions** has expanded its ride portfolio. Now, a new interactive ride concept called Hammered is enjoying its first location.

The name was created by **Logan Checketts**, president and CEO. It was inspired by the look and feel of what the ride does.

"We have good relationships with the family entertainment sector," Checketts said. "The Soaring Eagle zipline has been amazing for them. I have learned about what they like about a ride and what they need for a ride. I wanted something to [offer] them that they could operate indoors or outdoors and operate year round."

Checketts knew FECs loved arcade games and wanted to do a ride that was also a game. Designed to look like a high-striker midway game, Checketts combined a drop ride system with the fun of striking a plunger, which would send family members and friends up the tower. Because of that mallet component, he offers the ride under the name Hammered.

"The High Striker is an iconic piece that has been around forever," Checketts told *Amusement Today*. "The goal [of the ride] is to get the riders as high as you can. How hard you hit the plates determines how high and how fast they go."

The tower is decked out with numbers and lights to simulate the classic carnival game. A readout on the side of the tower keeps track of how high the riders traveled.

But it is the versatility that might be more attractive to potential operators. The ride system has seven modes, so each FEC can cater to its core audience or adjust it from ride to ride with the touch of a finger. A child's birthday part can be set at a milder level, while teens can ride following and experience high thrills. The ride can also deliver exhilarating gasps in a programmed mode that does not require the gaming component. "Imagine a Frog Hopper on steroids," Checketts joked about the extreme mode.

Hammered can be experienced by children 36 inches or taller. Checketts feels that when small kids start off with a gentler cycle, they return another day and work their way up to the more daring modes.

The first installation is now operating at **Starland Sportsplex and Fun Park**.

"With sweeping views and acres of untouched land, we originally planned to add a Soaring Eagle at Starland, but when Logan mentioned they were cooking up a new attraction we had to learn more," said **Kelsey Galante**, director of marketing and operations, Starland. "Who doesn't want to be the *first in the world* to offer a drop tower with a strong man component? We surely did! It looked thrilling, dynamic with the different modes, and unlike anything we'd seen before. We knew our customers would love it as much as we do."

"Being an interactive piece kind of sets this apart from other product on the market," said Checketts. "Envision a young boy with Mom and Dad sitting on the tower. Depending on how hard he hits that plate determines how high Mom and Dad go. We tested all the scenarios. It's super fun to see kids hit the plate and parents go flying up. The interactivity is a really fun piece."

"Starland has gone through many iterations since first opening in 1968," said Galante. "In 2012 our current ownership purchased the property and transformed the driving range into a sports complex, solidifying Starland as a one stop shop for family fun. As robust as the Fun Park may seem with go-karts, 18-hole mini golf, six batting cages, 30-foot rock wall, four bungy trampolines, bumper cars, laser tag, 4-seat XD Dark Ride and a 35-game arcade, we wanted to add that 'wow' factor attraction for thrill seekers and families alike. The Hammered drop tower offers just that."

It is also possible to adjust the challenge. The participant's weight can determine how hard the plunger must be struck, if the operator wishes to set it up that way.

The most extreme mode sends riders down faster than a freefall.

"We do have a natural [freefall] drop mode in there, but with the extreme experience, you actually feel the seat going away from you," Checketts told *AT*. "It's the most exciting ride on there. It catches everyone off guard. When you do that on a 30-foot tower before the magnetic brakes kick in, it's a really big thrill."

"It seemed to go up *forever*… 30 feet is much higher than you expect!" said Galante. "Just when you start to feel comfortable with the height, you realize you don't know what to expect with the drops! There are several different modes you can choose from — the customer and employee favorite is the sampler, which gives you a little bit of everything."

Checketts looks forward to exhibiting the new ride at the IAAPA Expo.

Part of the ride experience are the whimsical and fun sounds that emanate from the ride as visitors bounce up and down. A larger version featuring additional seating is being developed.

Even with this new product unveiled, the Soaring Eagle line is still selling well. Recent installations have included the **Cleveland Zoo** (Ohio), **Camp Courageous** (Iowa) and **Inner Space Caverns** (Texas).

"We did two in the Cleveland Zoo," said Checketts. "It's really beautiful. It's one of our best installations. The location and quality of install goes right over the lake and gives a view of the whole zoo. At the top of the 140-foot tower you can see downtown Cleveland."

•altitudeattractions.com



The Soaring Eagle Zipline attraction has proven popular with family entertainment centers. COURTESY CLEVELAND ZOO



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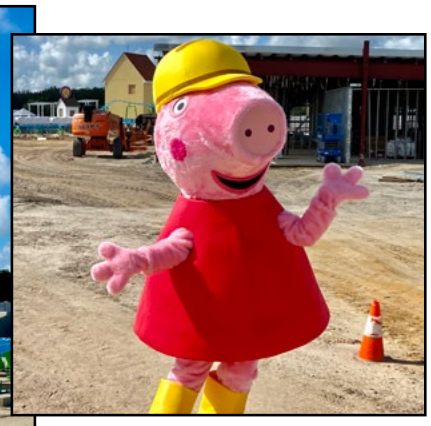
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Peppa Pig's Theme Park is taking shape beside Legoland Florida

AT: *David Fake*
Special to Amusement Today



The Zamperla-designed Daddy Pig's Roller Coaster will transform the coaster's train into his signature red car.
AT/DAVID FAKE



WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — *Amusement Today* was invited to **Legoland Florida** for an exclusive and "oinktastic" hard hat tour of **Peppa Pig's Theme Park** to check in on construction progress and even help "Dig up the Road!"

The new park, announced earlier this year, is taking shape quickly adjacent to the entrance of Legoland Florida. Even from outside the park's construction fence, guests of Legoland Florida can see the Pig Family's house, and even Peppa herself, atop one of the parks themed rides.

Designed to be the ultimate day for little ones, the theme park will combine interactive rides with themed play areas, character shows, a dining experience, and an indoor cinema for quieter moments with five-minute Peppa Pig short films on a constant loop.

Every corner of the new park is crafted with preschoolers in mind, from their first roller coaster rides with their parents and free fair games for the whole family, to an all-terrain course where they will pedal tricycles through a sensory-rich trail, to a colorful splash pad that celebrates "muddy puddles" jumping fun.

Through every experience, families will snort, giggle, and create their family's first theme park memories together with Peppa and her friends, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

"Everything from the shows to the theme park [rides] are designed and crafted from a preschoolers-first perspective so [their experience] is their 'best day ever,' said **Kelly Hornick**, senior public relations manager. "For many of the guests, this will be their first theme park experience, their first roller coaster ride. Those experiences are big and momentous occasions, and we wanted the parents to be a part of that."

Keith Carr, director of design and construction - North America for Merlin Entertainments, further explained the concept by adding, "The entire park design keeps in mind that our youngest 'piggies,' and probably some parents, are sometimes intimidated, overwhelmed or feel like they may need to have some additional support, so all of the attractions are designed to allow all members of the family to participate." Because families can experience the rides together, there is no need for a child swap at Peppa Pig's Theme Park.

Carr explained that as they were laying out the 4.5-acre theme park, they wanted to create a concept of 'play and ride.' So, the park has options for all their guests where they can ride the rides or play on the multiple play areas and splashpad. When looking over the park map it is evident those two concepts alternate throughout the entire theme park.

At the center of the park is Pig family's iconic yellow house and the **Zamperla** designed Daddy Pig's Roller Coaster, which transforms the coaster's train into his signature red car. The family coaster will take guests out for a drive, but once started, they will discover that Mr. Bull is 'digging up the road,' and the car must take a detour on Daddy Pig's curvy shortcut.

Other rides in the new park will include: Peppa Pig's Balloon Ride, which will provide the

See PEPPA, page 29



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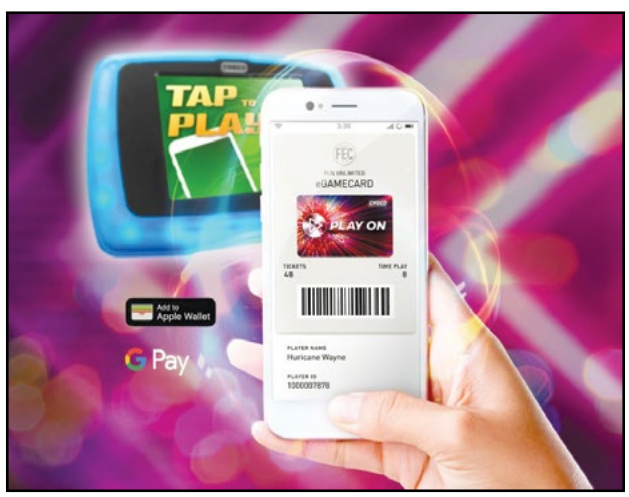
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Laser Bounce adapts for success, adds Mobile Wallet from Embed

AT: *John W.C. Robinson*
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New York's Laser Bounce FECs pride themselves on being able to reinvent themselves while providing guests with something that cannot be replicated at home. The FECs went cashless in 2021 with Embed's popular Mobile Wallet system (right). COURTESY LASER BOUNCE, EMBED

LONG ISLAND, N.Y. — **Laser Bounce** is a popular New York-area family fun center offering attractions including arcade games, bowling, laser tag, Hologate VR, Ballocity arena, Bounce arena and more. This family-owned and operated business began in Long Island in 2010 and recently expanded to a second location in Queens, New York, in 2018. The FEC works to combine mom-and-pop hospitality with corporate amenities to offer its guests the total package with an enhanced guest experience.

"The first Laser Bounce location opened in July 2010 in Long Island, New York. We originally had an arcade, laser tag and an inflatable bounce arena," explained **Ryan D'Amico**, co-owner and general manager of the FECs. "We expanded in 2012 and added Highway 66 bowling, Lazer Frenzy and Ballocity."

One of Laser Bounce's ongoing challenges was modernizing and offering guests a more consistent experience while reducing costs. D'Amico knew the limitations of not having a cashless business solution was impacting the guest experience.

"I feel the strengths of an FEC are the ability to reinvent yourself, with consumer entertainment options at an all time high, FECs have to provide their customers something that cannot be replicated at home and give a great reason to return to your center," stated D'Amico.

By partnering with **Embed**, Laser Bounce fine-tuned its guest experience to create a consistent experience for families visiting each location. D'Amico knew it was time to get his father (Laser Bounce's co-owner) on board to bring the enhanced technology of the Embed system into their location.

"The working relationship my father and I have is fantastic. With that, he values my input on new

See LASER, page 30

PEPPA

Continued from page 28

opportunity for guests to take to the sky with Peppa Pig and their families in Miss Rabbit's hot air balloon with brilliant views from the top; Grandad Dog's Pirate Boat Ride, a family boat ride in search of hidden treasure; Grampy Rabbit's Dinosaur Adventure, a Steeplechase-style tracked ride upon a friendly dinosaur; Mr. Bull's High Striker, a family bounce ride themed to a carnival hammer and bell striker game; and Peppa's Pedal Bike Tour and George's Tricycle Trail, where "little piggies" will pedal their way through a camping adventure in the woods, through the icy mountains to see the sights, smells and sounds of the great outdoors with two courses utilizing two different sized tricycles.

In addition to the rides, there are six interactive play areas that consists of playgrounds, a maze, a fort, a treehouse, a greenhouse, discovery trails, and splash area, all themed to the many characters of Peppatown.

Other attractions include Mr. Potato's Showtime Arena, which will showcase a rotation of live shows throughout the day that are packed full of songs, games, snorts, and giggles, and a themed-indoor dining experience, of which full details have not yet been announced.

An official opening date of Peppa Pig's Theme Park will be announced in the coming months.





Laser Bounce's arcade offerings have been upgraded to accept Embed's Mobile Wallet. COURTESY LASER BOUNCE

LASER BOUNCE FAMILY FUN CENTER

LASER

Continued from page 29

technology and lets me take the steering wheel. Although he was first hesitant to move to an online booking system, the value was easily redeemed when we noticed that majority of our customers were quicker to book online than instore," stated D'Amico. "So when it came to choose to move to a debit card system, the reviews were well spoken and also the ease of promotions made the decision very simple and we have zero regrets."

Embed's solution aligns with the FEC's goals and the technological advancements Laser Bounce is looking to add in the future; it grows as the company grows. By offering Embed's Mobile Wallet, a virtual game card that sits in the Apple Wallet and Google Pay, Laser Bounce provides its customers with a fully contact-free payment and FEC experience. Guests have immediate access to balance information, ticket counts, and more.

"We like to be the leader in introducing innovations, and especially with COVID, getting the Mobile Wallet was a no-brainer," said D'Amico. "Having the Mobile Wallet was not only great for our reopening, but it's nice for customers to see we're at the top of our game with arcade technology. We are an active children's entertainment center. We pride ourselves on a safe, clean environment that offers attractions for the entire family."

Eliminating labor-intensive manual processes through automation freed D'Amico from the back office, allowing him to deliver the mom-and-pop hospitality that sets Laser Bounce apart from the rest. In addition, management reports that guest love not having to use cash for games, and with Embed's automated reports, Laser Bounce is more operationally efficient (lower manpower) at each location.

"Implementing the Embed system brought several benefits," D'Amico said. "Cost-savings from not purchasing tickets and tokens, labor-savings from not counting them (no paper jams requiring service and repair), the ease of use, and increase in guest satisfaction — it's a crucial part of our business. We were able to use embed to allow for new promotions and were easily able to adjust to our new business hours."

Both Laser Bounce locations took advantage of the time during the COVID shutdown to install and implement the Embed system. Reopening after the shutdowns presented its own challenges, however.

"It was very gradual, but luckily [business has] slowly and steadily increased as COVID restrictions have diminshed," offered D'Amico. "We have updated our hours and our staffing to accommodate for additional cleaning. We have used Embed's COVD package to create amazing signage throughout our facility to show our customers all the protocols we have taken to ensure their safety. In addition, we were able to use Embed's sytem to allow for new promotions and were easily able to adjust to our new business hours."

With guests steadily returning in 2021 and success with Embed's Mobile Wallet system, the future looks bright for Laser Bounce.

"At this time we are focusing on our current locations and may eventually like to open additional locations," said D'Amico.



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Samanea New York Mall's efforts to reposition itself from being a mostly vacant mall to a bustling lifestyle and entertainment destination have led to a long-term lease with **X-Golf**.

A combination indoor golf simulator, restaurant and bar venue, the X-Golf franchise is expected to open in November 2021 with about 6,300 square feet in Samanea New York Mall, which was formerly called the **Mall at the Source** in Westbury, New York.

"X-Golf's proprietary technology is 98% accurate and allows guests to replicate all golf shots, while measuring ball speed, launch, direction, and spin, along with club path, and impact. The X-Golf system performs over 6,000 calculations per second," Samanea issued in a press release.

After years of high vacancy rates, Samanea New York Mall underwent a $28 million renovation that was completed in March as the mall's owner — **Lesso Mall Development Long Island Inc.**, a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based **Lesso Group Holdings Ltd.** — tried to improve its fortunes by focusing on bringing in a different mix of tenants. Lesso bought the mall for $92 million in 2017.

•

A large indoor pickleball facility to be located in Mankato, Minnesota, is moving through the municipal permitting process with a groundbreaking planned for the fall.

Preliminary approval from the Mankato City Council was expected in early August for **Picklebarn**. The proposed facility will offer eight indoor pickleball courts for the fast-growing sport that's particularly popular with baby boomers and retirees. The outdoor portion of the complex may also include a bonus for tennis players — the region's only clay-surface tennis courts. When complete, the Picklebarn will be a 37,000-square-foot FEC.

Last spring, St. Peter natives **Sidney** and **Mitch Elofson** announced initial plans for the facility, which will also include a mezzanine level for players to snack and socialize while watching games on courts below.

"We love our location," Sidney Elofson said of the eight-acre site on the city's fast-growing east side. "It was important to us to have a country club feel which could feel like home to our guests."

•

MajorMega, creator of the Hyperdeck VR attraction, has partnered with database expert **Globobeet** to analyze a dataset of 100,000 recent Hyperdeck games to uncover key insights about replay performance and revenue generated.

Their analysis revealed that on average a Hyperdeck generates a whopping $20,799 per month with an average ticket price of $11.80 per player. Some facilities even earned over $38,000 in a single month.

"I knew all of our Hyperdecks were performing well and that we were the top earner at many facilities" said **Mike Bridgman**, co-founder and CTO of MajorMega, "but to see it laid out so clearly in the data makes it very tangible."

The data also revealed significant repeat play statistics, including: an average of 13.8% of players return to play again in the same month, while an impressive 18.6% came back more than once in the last three months. The top 10 players have a combined 241 games in the last three months alone with an average of three plays per visit.

•

Free Play Worcester held its grand opening in early August for it's newest Massachusetts location. The chain has its original location in Providence, Rhode Island.

The adults-only location gives free unlimited play on all of its games for a flat fee of $7 at the door, rising to $10 on Friday and Saturdays. The bar-arcade has 76 classic video games, 20 pinball machines, half a dozen table sports games and a photo booth.

•

A Riverhead, New York, bowling alley was able to survive the pandemic after getting help from **Barstool Sports**.

Chris Keller opened **The All Star** bowling alley in 2012. "This place is a labor of love," he said. "The All Star is a beautiful family entertainment center. We have 28 lanes of bowling, we have a six-lane VIP room that's great for parties and special events, we host leagues, fundraisers and open play all the time."

Keller says business was thriving until the pandemic hit and the alley had to shut down for five months. Fortunately, The All Star was chosen by Barstool Sports to receive funds to help them get back in business.

"We were lucky enough to be chosen by Barstool Sports," said Keller. "The Barstool Fund is a fund that was created by **Dave Portnoy** to help small businesses — they helped us with a mortgage for several months."

With help from the fund, All Star was able to reopen in August 2020.

•

Andrea Walton plans to create a family entertainment center on her family's farm in Medina, New York, where she grew up.

"There are a lot of pieces to this puzzle, and I will add one piece at a time," Walton said.

She is calling her proposed venture the **Donkey's Barnyard**, and her plans include a miniature golf course along the bank of nearby Oak Orchard Creek. She wants to have gemstone mining for children, U-pick pumpkins, a corn maze, a petting zoo and a playground. One of the barns will become an ice cream and hot dog stand.

Walton, who works for a wholesale plumbing and heating contractor, looked at developing such a site 12 years ago. She took an entrepreneurial class then, but the plan fell apart, she said.

"The idea has been back in my head for a long time," she said. Her goal is to be able to start construction on the miniature golf course by next spring.


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Despite naysayers, attendance was up during the York State Fair

AT: *B. Derek Shaw*
bdshaw@amusementtoday.com







The Bertazzon double-decker carousel was one of the most popular rides at the fair (above left). Strates Shows brought in 40 rides, of which 16 were kiddie ones, along with 42 games and 10 food stands (above right). The Strates brothers (from left): Jay, John and Jimmy. They are third generation owners (right). AT/B. DEREK SHAW

YORK, Pa. — America's first fair changed its name and operational dates starting this year, weathering the naysayer storm. When all was said and done, attendance was up 4%, ending at 532,037 people.

"For the most part we had great weather, said **Bryan Blair**, general manager and CEO of the **York State Fair**. "Both Fridays and Saturdays were near perfect. We had a few thunderstorms some weekdays but nothing that canceled events like what happened in 2018. Storms generally passed in half an hour. [We] had hot and humid conditions during the week, but people still came out."

Since 1942, the fair had been held the first Friday after Labor Day.

"There have been some negative comments over the last two years, but as the fair approached, more and more people began voicing their support," said Blair. "I have seen comments on social media from people who had spent the last two years voicing opposition of the date change who then stated they attended the fair this year. Based on attendance and spending, we appear to have won a large portion of the population over to the July date."

Two years ago, the fair board also changed the event name. "We began using the word 'state' in our name because there are 60-plus fairs in the nation that use the word in their name. Half of those are nonprofits like us that have little or no state oversight," said Blair. "When you compare us to them, we are similar or larger in terms of budget, size, facilities, entertainment, midway, entries, attendance and so forth. So, the thought became, 'Why don't we tell people we are more like a state fair than a county fair in terms of size?'"

Strates Shows, Inc. brought in 40 rides, of which 16 were kiddie ones. They had 42 games and 10 food outlets. The total was completed with three from **Stevie Ianni** (**Red Carpet Amusements**), two from **S & W Amusements** and one from **Vinnie Tolvi** (**Lyndhurst Industries)**. The top rides included the Giant Wheel (**Natubussik/Holland**), Haunted Mansion (**Owen Trailers Inc.**) and the double-decker carousel (**Bertazzon)**. Strates used a cashless system. "The Fun Card system was well received, and there were no issues at all with it on our side of things," said Blair.

New for the season was an Owen Trailers Monkey Maze. "We had a previous Monkey Maze, which was 17 years old. We decided to trade it about the time the pandemic hit," said **John Strates**, operations director. "We took delivery of it after we tried to open back up in South Carolina last year. We used it for one spot, until this season." Strates says it is quite popular. "It's a real good piece. It's usually one of our highest ridership rides, because they technically go through it two or three times, back-to-back."

The schedule was altered for 2021.

"The routing changed drastically this year because of COVID," said Strates. "We normally would jump from Florida all the way to New York, Long Island and work in Brookhaven for a month before we went to **State Fair Meadowlands**, New Jersey. But because New York was still shut down with COVID regulations, we came north from Florida up to Columbia, South Carolina, and worked there three weekends and then moved into Hickory, North Carolina. We've never played South Carolina [and] North Carolina in the spring, in many years."

From there the operation went to the Meadowlands, then to York. Past spots have included Angelica, Allegheny, Batavia or Middletown, then Elmira, all in New York. After York, Strates headed straight to the **Erie County Fair**, Hamburg, New York, then to Vermont.

None of the equipment was brought in by rail, a signature delivery method of the show. "It was all the uncertainty of [COVID]. What we decided, kind of late in the game, was we're going to go out at about 75% of what we normally do, and with that we are certainly not willing to completely load the train and ship it north, because of all the uncertainties," said Strates. "We really didn't have permits anywhere. We were much more conservative pushing north than we would have been. Once you've loaded [the train] it's a 100 percent thing; you're either taking the train or not. Downsizing doesn't give you any real cost benefits," said Strates. "It's easier to scale while you are on a truck than you are with a train. If you want to leapfrog or cut back equipment, it's very tough to do when you are moving the train, as opposed to moving trucks. You can send equipment ahead with the trucks. You have more flexibility on the trucks than you do on the rail. When we get back to some more normalcy, you'll see the train loaded back up."

"We're really happy to be back working," said Strates, after a 41-year absence in York. "We had a very, very strong run. The grandstand's been great. The attendance and the ridership's been great. We've had very few problems. The people are nice, and the crowds have been receptive. Bryan Blair has put together a great team. The staff he has working for him are a pleasure to be around. They welcome you with open arms. Everyone we have dealt with here are just super accommodating. It's very nice to be at a well-run facility — it's very professional."

Regarding working with Strates, Blair said, "Outstanding throughout the entire process. We've been talking about this fair for over two years from when we signed [with] Strates. They have been very easy to work with, and our teams get along really well. We had no significant challenges, and I think the public was ready for their return to York as evidenced by what appears to be a record ride gross in excess of $1,000,000."

"A lot of older people have come by and said, 'We remember the train unloading and remember the Strates show here. We're just happy to have you back,"' said Strates, feeling support from the local community. "A lot of times you sit at the office and you deal with all the ticket complaints or 'my wrist band fell off' or 'I tripped and fell.' Here it's been people walking up, greeting us and talking about the good old days, reminiscing some about the Strates Shows. It's been good."

Special promotions included **Peoples Bank** dollar day, **Weis** (supermarket) Wednesday and **UPMC** (hospital) Heroes Appreciation Day. The fair advertising budget was increased by $50,000 this year to $300,000. The entire increase went toward digital media. The fair also went heavy on billboards and radio/television to promote concert ticket sales.

"About a week before, we switched to generic fair ads," said Blair. "Our media buyer told me it was the first time in a LONG time that we were able to do that. I felt we had to because we needed to make sure people knew about the date change."

COVID's impact was felt in numerous ways, as Blair explained: "First, I think the older demographic is still pretty nervous about COVID and in particular the Delta variant which was getting a lot of publicity prior to and during the fair. I think this is part of the reason Horticultural Hall entries were a bit down and the same for Old Main. Also, the school section of Old Main was down because there was no in-person learning for most of the last academic year. Our plan was to have kids complete projects in school before classes were dismissed for the summer, and we would store the items at the fairgrounds. I also think that the year 4-H had, battling the restrictions, contributed to fewer entries there as well."

Nine of the 10 nights had music offerings (eight paid, one free) with a demolition derby the final evening. **Kane Brown** drew nearly 10,000 and **REO Speedwagon/Styx** did more than 8,000. The shows averaged 5,475 tickets per concert.

"We spent over $1.366 million on this lineup and the entire lineup was paid for with ticket sales! That's the second fair in

See YORK, page 33

IAFE Convention returning to in-person event in 2021

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. — The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** have announced that the 2021 IAFE Convention — scheduled for Nov. 28-Dec. 1 — at the **Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center** in San Antonio, Texas, will be held in-person.

"We are so looking forward to meeting again in person," said IAFE President and CEO **Marla Calico**. "We've heard from members eager to see one another at the convention, to build upon the friendships and networks, many of which were strengthened through the many online meetings and calls our association hosted in the last year."

Programming for the convention remains fluid as the IAFE monitors what 2021 brings for its fairs. Attendees can expect the same top-notch, cutting-edge workshops that have been given in previous years, but with a fresh spin.

Award-winning photographer **Paul Mobley** will serve as the event's keynote speaker.

"Our fair community has been 'Growing Fair Strong' all year, but we cannot wait to gather in person at the IAFE Annual Convention. The convention will give our network a chance to not only learn from each other but to also celebrate accomplishments and being together again," said IAFE Director of Meetings **Kate Turner**.

Convention registration and hotel bookings began on July 26, with early-bird discount pricing available until Oct. 1. Many scholarships and grants are available to help members defray cost of travel and have an application deadline of Aug. 31.

With a new two-day format, the IAFE Trade Show will include ribbon and award manufacturers, talent agencies, equipment manufacturers, entertainers as well as ticket companies.

"Nearly 250 booth spaces have been confirmed for this year's 2021 IAFE Trade Show," said IAFE Trade Show Manager **Steve Siever**.

•iafeconvention.com

YORK

Continued from page 32

a row we've done that…which is unheard of these days," said Blair. "We are already booking our stage for 2022 and have some really big plans in place as we continue to expand on our lineup. All told between the **Bobcat of York** grandstand stage and the **Froggy** (radio station) free stage, we had 43 musical acts over 10 days at the fair. That number puts us in pretty elite company in terms of the number of musical acts we present each year."

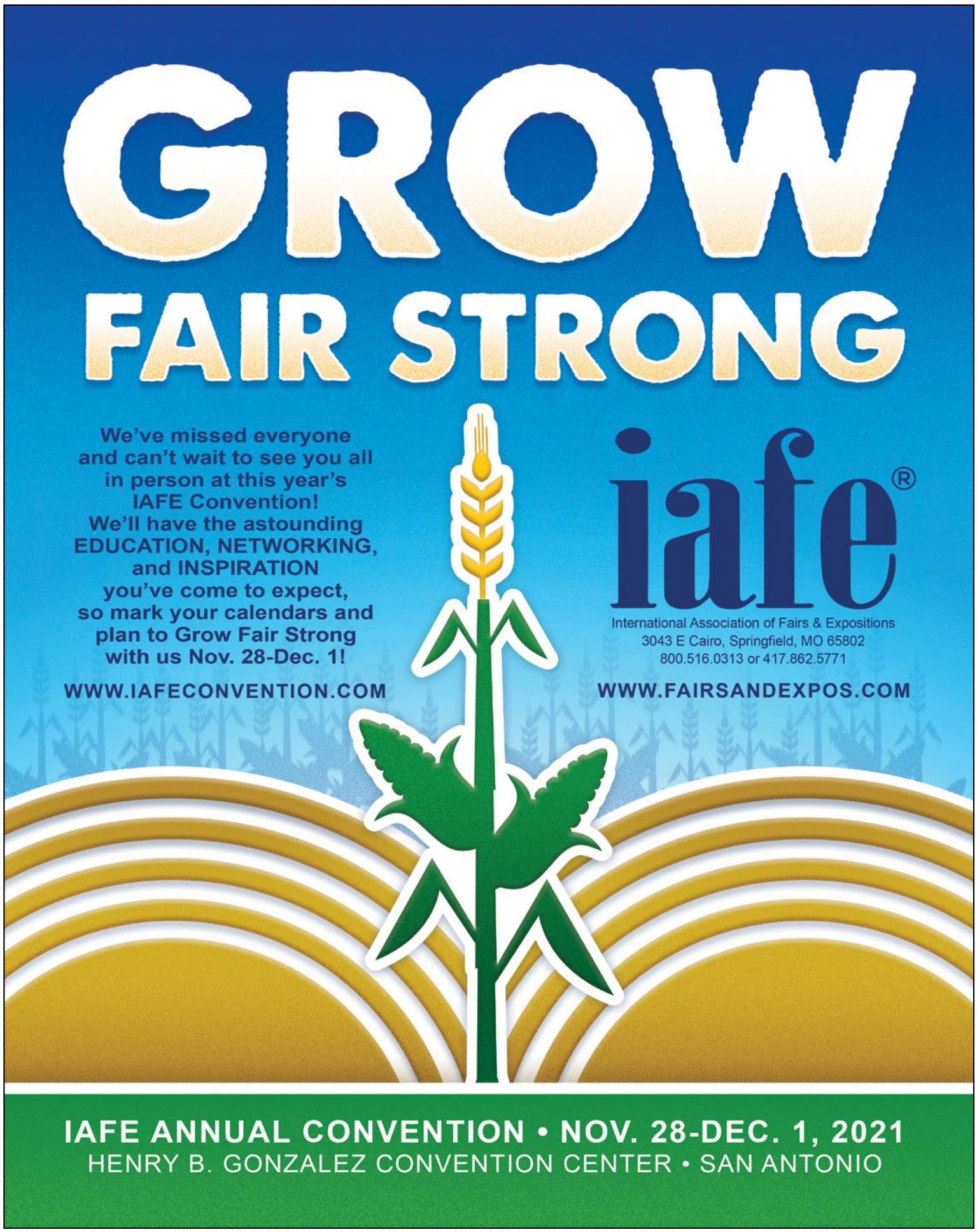
In response to being asked what sets the York State Fair apart, Blair said, "I like to think it's that we are a crown jewel in the fair industry as America's first fair founded in 1765. We may not be the largest, but the 'first fair' status certainly gives us a seat at the table with the top fairs in the nation. We also have now covered the costs of major grandstand lineups for two consecutive fairs. In a time when other fairs have struggled to sell tickets and cope with rising entertainment costs, we are proving it can be done here!"

Given the circumstances; Blair is pleased with the outcome. "I knew that July could work, but the numbers exceeded even my wildest dreams. It will be interesting to see in 2022 if things normalize and we see how much of this is related to people being ready to get back out after a year and a half of sitting at home. I think we are on to something really special, and we will continue to make improvements this coming year and produce an even better event next year," he said.

"Long term I think it will work out for both of us," agreed Strates. "It's hard to find a good, old fair at the right time of year for a carnival when you're doing your routing. This one just clicked. It worked. I'm super excited about what the future can be here, because I think it can grow."

The next York State Fair is July 22-31, 2022.

•yorkstatefair.org



More than half a million attendees descend on Calgary Stampede

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With international travel restrictions still in place, the "Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth" in 2021 was put on by Calgarians for Calgarians. Nightly fireworks were provided upon conclusion of the grandstand show. COURTESY SCOOTER KOREK/NAME

CALGARY, Alberta, Canada — While attendance was 50% less than during a normal year, the past year and a half has been anything but normal. A total of 528,998 ended up passing through the turnstiles for **Calgary Stampede**.

"This is just under half of our traditional average. Overall park capacity and venue reductions [were] in place as enhanced pandemic safety protocols," said **Jason Coxford**, director, corporate communications.

The Stampede is known around the world as the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth. However, in 2021, it was put on by Calgarians *for* Calgarians.

"With international travel restrictions still in place, the Stampede opening only eight short days after the lifting of provincial restrictions, and only a few days after the repealing of the municipal mask bylaw [was a feat]," said Coxford. "To be able to welcome people to our annual celebration at Stampede Park is a success. To be able to safely host approximately 50,000 people a day is even more of a success."

"The weather was almost perfect, less than a half an hour of rain during the entire stampede," said **Scooter Korek**, vice president, client services, **North American Midway Entertainment (NAME)**. "Due to the pandemic, we started on a slow climb, yet as the Stampede progressed, we gained speed every day. By the end, we had returned to almost normal. We certainly missed the international and visitors outside of Alberta, but overall, given the pandemic conditions, this was a very successful Stampede."

NAME brought in 44 rides, of which 18 were kiddie rides that were on the Great Funtier Kids' Midway. This was in addition to 45 games and 12 food stands. The three most popular rides were Polar Express (**Mack Rides GmbH & Co KG**), Crazy Mouse (**Zamperla, Inc.**) and Flume (**Reverchon Industries**).

"In a year the carnival made its return to Calgary, the emphasis was on the rides we missed. We did not debut any new rides at the 2021 Stampede," said Coxford.

Calgary Stampede has a great affiliation with NAME. "We have a long-standing relationship with North American Midway Entertainment, a great history of thrilling Stampede guests together. NAME has been adaptable and resilient through the pandemic operating safely at fairs across the USA. That experience and success delivering the carnival safely provided us valuable insight for our planning and confidence in measures taken," said Coxford.

"The Calgary Stampede was nothing short of trailblazers and set the stage by opening for so many other events, festivals, and fairs to open in the near future," said Korek.

COVID-19 mitigation on the NAME midway included hand sanitizers, ride sanitizing, face masks for staff and social distancing markers at rides, games and food. For the entire Stampede, efforts included:

•Reduced overall capacity of Stampede Park.

•Expanded hours of higher traffic value days to avoid congestion (i.e., Community Day allowed for children to enter free all day instead of a traditional two-hour window.

•A modified park layout created 25% more space on the grounds.

•Mandatory masking and a robust rapid testing program for frontline volunteers and employees

•Proof of vaccination or rapid test for entry into Nashville North.

•Sanitization stations.

•Enhanced safety and cleaning protocols — industry-leading cleaning procedures throughout Stampede Park.

•Rodeo competitors safely participated through a modified quarantine program

Special promotions included **Cenovus Energy** family day, a community day, free admission Sunday (July 18), free admission for front line workers on certain days and free admission for 2020 and 2021 graduates on certain days.

The media mix and advertising budget broke down to 35% online, 18% billboards, 17% television, 15% radio and 15% print.

When asked about new, best or unusual food items, Coxford said, "Pickle lemonade from **Fruit in a Fruit** was a personal favorite for me this July — a perfect mix of tangy and tart and very refreshing. Flaming hot Cheeto mini donuts were a hit, for the more adventurous. The deep-fried pork intestines top the list of unusual eats. (I personally wasn't that adventurous.) If you were looking for an over-the-top treat, that Instagram-worthy, eye-catching delight would be the **Krispy Kreme** tornado. Six Krispy Kreme glazed donuts stacked on a stick and wrapped in a cloud of cotton candy.

"We hosted some of the midway favorites including the Dog Bowl canine stunt show, and Freestyle Motocross," said Coxford. "We surprised guests with a running, or should I say, waddling of the bulls. Six inflatable bull costumes made the shuffled dash across our midway twice daily. Of note was the addition of feature country music acts **Terri Clark** and **High Valley** to our grandstand show. The multi-award-winning, international stars split their time here five days apiece, kicking off the grandstand show nightly."

Coxford added, "This year, our community celebration was the first step in the safe return to live events for our city — and our country. And we are proud to lead the way."

The 2022 Calgary Stampede takes place July 8 - 17.

•calgarystampede.com





NAME operated with 44 rides, of which 18 were kiddie ones. Shown is the Mack Polar Express, one of the top three rides on the midway. The Zamperla Crazy Mouse (above right) was one of the most popular rides at the 10-day Calgary Stampede. Enhanced pandemic safety protocols limited attendance to 50%. COURTESY SCOOTER KOREK/NAME



MIDWAYSCENE

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Since age 16, **Heidi Long** had been in the carnival business. "I've been doing it all my life," said Long, 72, whose carnival, **Penn Wood Shows**, has ceased operations, another victim to COVID-19. The final blow came this spring when the Gettysburg, Pennsylvania-based ride provider had seven of her 11 spots cancel. Long could not justify the insurance cost to maintain those four locations. "Maybe it's time to retire," said Long. The company has 18 rides, with only one sold so far, a **Mulligan** Sea Ray to **Penn Valley Shows**, where it debuted at the Shillington, Pennsylvania Community Days in mid-July. "I hated to see it leave my driveway," said Long.

•

A job that doesn't usually get much recognition is about to be in the limelight, at least at the **South Dakota State Fair** in Huron. There is a grocery store bagging competition at this year's fair. The "best bagger" competition takes place Friday, September 3, on the Freedom Stage. The winner snags a trip to the national competition in Las Vegas. The fair runs September 2-6 with **GoldStar Amusements** handling the midway operation.

•

In early June, the **Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo** announced its plans for key events held during its weeklong celebration leading up to the 90th anniversary of the 2022 rodeo, scheduled for Feb. 28 to March 20. Festivities include Rodeo Roundup & Go Texan Day, the World's Championship Bar-B-Que Contest, Trail Rides, Rodeo Run and the Downtown Rodeo Parade. **Ray Cammack Shows (RCS)** will again be the midway provider.

•

Wolf Boy, a vintage sideshow attraction banner, is the inspiration behind an independent film called, *The Beast Comes at Midnight*. That motivation came after a 2019 visit to the **International Independent Showmen's Museum**, Riverview, Florida, by Tampa independent film producer, **Ed** and son **Michael McKeever**. Upon seeing the poster, both McKeever's wondered what the person covered in hair from head to toe would be up to these days.

"I thought, 'That's a great idea for a movie,'" McKeever told the *Tampa Bay Times*. "So, we went home and started writing the story together." Director **Robert Masciantonio** from Philadelphia turned their concept into a screenplay. Filming was scheduled to be completed last month.

The storyline is about a boy searching for a werewolf that is roaming the Tampa Bay area. The boy enlists the help of a monster hunter residing in Gibsonton where seasoned carnival workers retire. Other shooting locations include Ybor City, Fish Hawk and Plant City, Florida.

Distribution is through **Briefcase Pictures**, a company headed by **George C. Romero**, son of *Night of the Living Dead* creator **George A. Romero**. The total micro-budget is $165,000. Depending on public reaction, up to five movies could be made, based on stories from the showmen retirement community.

"We definitely want to do more films in what we call the 'show town area,'" McKeever said.

•

The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** is encouraging member fairs to participate in its first TikTok challenge. Details are simple. Post a video on TikTok with the following information: #FAIRSTRONG + category name + #Saffire + fair name/state. Choose a category in which to enter: trending sounds, funny or agricultural. Winning entries will be featured at the IAFE Convention and the winner will be provided a customized fair experience at their fair of choice. For more fairsandexpos.com/Membership-Benefits-Contests-Member-Recognition

•

This past spring, **Arizona State Fair** officials announced that the month-long October event would be moving away from the fairgrounds to a new home at Wild Horse Pass near Chandler, on the **Gila River Indian Community**. At the time, it was said to be a "temporary" move, allowing the fairgrounds to be available for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations and other health needs.

Organizers couldn't secure necessary infrastructure to hold the fair on the reservation this fall, prompting the move to stay in place. On their website it says COVID-19 led to supply chain problems across the country and caused delays in materials and supplies needed to move the event in time. "Due to the limited timeframe and supply concerns, keeping the Fair at its existing home makes the most sense for 2021," said **Jonathan Lines**, chairman of the **Arizona Exposition and State Fair Board**.

Officials with the Gila River Indian Community and Arizona State Fair say they will continue to investigate the possibility of moving the event to the reservation next year. "We remain committed to working with the Gila River Indian Community to see if we can move the Fair to the Gila River Indian Reservation in 2022 in a manner that is mutually beneficial to both sides," Lines told *KTVK 3TV* and *KPHO CBS 5*.

The 2021 Arizona State Fair opens October 2 and runs through October 30, with **Ray Cammack Shows** handling the midway operations.

•

Last month, a documentary on **Elizabeth "Libby" Custer**, a founder of the **Rockingham County Fair**, Harrisonburg, Virginia, debuted. Born in 1913, Custer was a female leader and local legend at a time when females in positions of leadership were rare. She participated in the first planning committee for the Rockingham County Fair in 1947.

Caitlin McAvoy wrote and directed "Libby" to honor her great, great aunt. In the film, Custer shares her wisdom from over 100 years of life as a female pioneer with endless passion and humor.

McAvoy revealed her purpose behind the project. "We all shared this bond of wanting to capture the secret of how she lived with this enthusiasm for life, even at 106. Libby lived by this expression: to get up, to dress up, to show up... I think that matters now more than ever," McAvoy told *WHSV-TV*. Custer passed in 2019.

On the Midway: Bartlebaugh Amusements, Inc.



From on top of the Nittany Rides Wheel is a birds-eye view of the annual New Freedom, Pennsylvania Lions Club carnival. Bartlebaugh Amusements brought in 15 rides. Three were not operating, due to a lack of help. The State College, Pennsylvania-based operation has a 50-ride inventory, spread between two units. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



One of the rarely seen vintage rides on the Bartlebaugh show is a Spindle manufactured by Nittany Rides. It is similar to a Scrambler. The new ride on the show this season is a Kolmax Dumbo Elephant ride that was a big hit on the midway. AT/B. DEREK SHAW



Bartlebaugh Amusements is a family affair. From left: Jennifer, Corine, Jason, four-year old Avery and Allen Bartlebaugh. Brother Jerry and wife Lisa have another unit that plays throughout Pennsylvania. The company has been providing family fun since 1984. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

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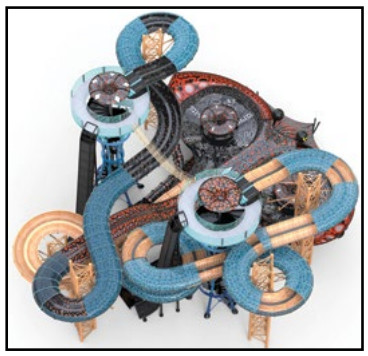
Great Wolf Lodge building Maryland resort — page 38 / News Splash — page 38

Polin Waterparks introduces colorful, high-tech Stingray attraction

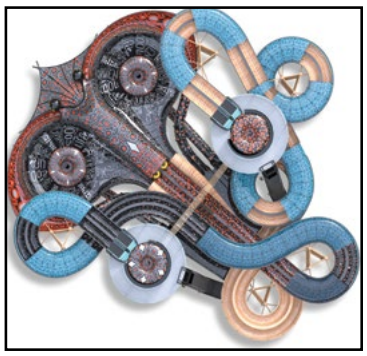
AT: *Jeffrey Seifert*
jseifert@amusementtoday.com



These various renderings show the extraordinary color variations and patterns that are prevalent throughout the massive Stingray attraction. COURTESY POLIN WATERPARKS







ISTANBUL, Turkey — **Polin Waterparks** has announced a new colorful, high-tech racing tube slide dubbed Stingray. The four-lane, eight-passenger attraction offers high capacity with multiple tube chutes in a compact design.

The enclosed flumes have multiple interweaving ride paths that exit into two gigantic bowls before guests race to the end. The two bowls contain two unique paths in each — one that is larger in diameter, longer, faster and more exhilarating and one that is smaller in diameter, shorter and focuses more on being entertaining.

Back in 2006, Polin started changing the way waterslides were manufactured with the introduction of Light-Resin Transfer Molding technology, producing lighter, stronger, more colorful, glossy waterslides. In 2016 Polin set out to transform waterslides into works of art with an advanced RTM process that incorporated a multitude of patterns and colors — both solid and translucent — to create an aesthetically pleasing, vibrant waterslide that, although incorporating patterns, is still perfectly smooth and with a lustrous, glossy surface on both sides. (See *Amusement Today*, March 2016.)

Taking that one step further is UTexture. Using Vacuum Assisted Resin Transfer Molding (VARTM), Polin can create even more dazzling patterns and unlimited themes that more closely resemble works of art. The new VARTM technology creates a glossy, beautifully aesthetic finish that is highly resistant to UV light, pool chemicals, and will keep its luster for years to come.

Not only does the new Stingray attraction offer multiple distinctive ride paths but its vivid, fiberglass theming and custom coloring is captivating. Taking advantage of the capabilities of Polin's state-of-the-art technology UTexture, its artwork is long-lasting, UV protected, integral, picture-perfect, and absolutely stunning. Although marketed with a stingray theme, that is not the only option. Polin's UTexture allows the attraction to be designed with any theme to match any client park's motif.



This slide closeup highlights a recent application of Polin's UTexture VARTM technology to a slide complex at the Kirman Arycanda De Luxe Hotel in Alanya, Turkey.
COURTESY POLIN WATERPARKS

A dazzling light and sound show also helps set Stingray apart from other slides. With this particular theme, guests will hear the sound of the Stingray's wings, flying through water, as they spin inside the huge inner bowl. In the outer bowl, the guests will explore the dark and mysterious ocean with a sound and light show and then complete their amazing experience as they are quickly dispersed around the wings. This contrast in special effects further sets the experience of the two paths apart. The light and sound show can be adapted to any theme.

The guest experience begins as soon as they enter the attraction. The ride's two towers, situated within the ride itself, allow those waiting in line to observe and even interact with riders as they spin through the ride's bowls. A one-of-a-kind roof structure not only provides shade but also a cooling mist overhead while guests get ready to enter one of the four flume entrances. The ride path is different off of each tower, giving riders four unique experiences from one attraction. With multiple lanes, riders are encouraged to keep returning to the waterslide to ensure they experience all four of the options. Regardless of which chute the rider chooses, they can be assured of having an exciting experience each time as they whirl around the sides of the bowl achieving speeds up to 30 mph. On the larger, outer bowl, centrifugal force will carry the raft high onto the sides of the bowl. In the smaller inside bowl, riders should get at least two full rotations before dropping into the center. Each ride path is approximately 160 meters (525 feet). Theoretical capacity of the attraction utilizing two-person rafts is 720 riders per hour.

In addition to the sound and light show, portions of the slide can be equipped with translucent natural light effects, in the form of translucent stripes or shapes through which the sun's ray stream creates an even more alluring experience.

With its custom capabilities, iconic look, impressive stature within a compact footprint, combined with lights, sounds, multiple ride paths and the capabilities of Polin's state-of-the-art technology UTexture coloration, Stingray can be a standout main attraction at any water park.



Great Wolf Resorts building latest record-breaking lodge

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CHICAGO — Ground was broken on July 20, 2021, on what will become the 20th **Great Wolf Lodge**. Located just outside of Baltimore in Perryville, Maryland, at the Chesapeake Overlook, the new lodge will be visible from I-95 and offer views of the Susquehanna River.

The new lodge will be **Great Wolf Resorts'** largest according to **Steven Jacobson**, vice president of domestic development, and will include a 700-room resort and a 126,000-square-foot water park. Known throughout the world for its famous indoor water parks, Great Wolf is building a massive indoor structure in Maryland that will feature two 75-foot slide towers, instead of the typical one. Exact details of the slides have yet to be released, but GWR has promised a variety of body slides, tube slides, raft rides, activity pools and splash areas for every member of the family.

Accompanying the lodge and indoor water park will be Great Wolf Adventure Park — a 57,000-square-foot family entertainment center with a number of family-friendly attractions such as a ropes course, rock climbing wall, bowling center, arcade games and MagiQuest, Great Wolf's exclusive live action adventure game that has players using interactive magic wands to battle goblins and dragons.

Several dining options will appeal to a variety of culinary styles ranging from pizza and burgers, to upscale dining at Barnwood and premium ice cream treats at Wood's End Creamery.

The property will include 12,000 square feet of flexible conference space with breakout rooms with built-in A/V technology, customizable catering options and a team of dedicated industry professionals to tend to every meeting need.

"As we look to expand the Great Wolf Lodge experience to new markets, we are excited to place our newest resort in Perryville, Maryland, and provide Mid-Atlantic families with an easy, carefree escape where kids and parents will laugh, play and have joy-filled adventures together," said **Murray Hennessy**, chief executive officer for Great Wolf Resorts. "Being a short driving distance from several key markets makes Perryville an ideal location for a Great Wolf Lodge. With the tremendous support from the state, county and town, as well as our shareholders **Blackstone** and **Centerbridge Partners**, we're excited to make this resort a reality. We're eager to be a part of this community and to help contribute to its continued growth and prosperity."

As part of Great Wolf Lodge's environmental initiative, Project Green Wolf, the resort will offer preferred parking with charging stations for electric vehicles. The lodge will also institute a number of energy and water conservation measures such as energy-saving LED lighting and special water filters to reduce consumption.

First announced in 2018, the project was put on hold during the global pandemic. However, when the project was able to resume, Great Wolf Resorts agreed to expand the lodge adding 200 more guest rooms bringing the total to more than 700, many of which will be family-friendly suites. Great Wolf themed suites will offer separate sleeping quarters for kids designed as either a log cabin or wolf den and will be outfitted with bunk beds and Great Wolf character theming. The resort will also feature suites with multiple bedrooms for large families or multi-generational groups.

•greatwolf.com



NEWSSPLASH

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Following several weather and supply-related delays, the new **Thompson Park Aquatic Facility** in Amarillo, Texas, opened to the public on July 24.

At a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony, City of Amarillo Director of Parks & Recreation **Michael Kashuba** said, "This project was highly anticipated and truly a collaboration between our city leaders and local community members. We had many members of our community help determine what this pool would look like and how it would best serve our city. I have no doubt that this pool will make our citizens proud and will serve our area well for many years to come."

The $8 million, six-acre site includes a new zero-depth-entry leisure pool with a sun-shelf deck, deck-side spray features, lazy river with a vortex pool, two pool-side basketball hoops and a designated toddler play area..

The aquatic center replaced the original **Thompson Park Pool** which had been in operation since 1931. It was closed in December 2018.

•

On July 18, **Aquapolis Cullera**, a small, family-friendly water park in Valencia, Spain, was evacuated due to the proximity of a forest fire that was raging on a nearby mountain. The fire was reported at 3:45 p.m. in an area of vegetation near the park. As a precaution, the water park, filled with a weekend crowd of people, was evacuated. Three teams from the local town of Cullera as well as neighboring cities were called in to fight the blaze. Thanks to the efforts of the firefighters, there was no damage to the water park.

•

Separating itself from the **Hilton** luxury brand, the former **Boca Raton Resort & Club, A Waldorf Astoria Resort**, in Boca Raton, Florida, is now known simply as the **Boca Raton.**

Included in the $175 million resort-wide renovation is the addition of a four-acre **Harborside Pool Club**, which will feature four pools, a 450-foot lazy river, two three-story waterslides, an event lawn, a 5,000-square-foot kids club and a teens lounge. Guests at the Pool Club will have access to private cabanas with personalized butler service, poolside restaurants, swim-up bars, and plenty of umbrella-shaded or waterside lounge chairs on which to relax. The Harborside Pool Club is slated to launch this winter.

•

The City of St. Albans, in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador broke ground in July on a new city pool and recreation center. The pool, to be built at the **Hard'ack Recreation Area**, will be at the base of an existing ski hill. A spokesman for the city said the project was born out of a clear and evident need for a larger facility for the hundreds of St. Albans residents who use the pool across from the city school every day of the season. That pool, now 15 years beyond its useful life, is in desperate need of replacement.

City voters approved the issuance of bonds to cover the CA$4.75 (US$3.8) million project. Although interconnected, the new pool has three distinct areas: A lap pool for lessons and exercise, a zero-entry pool for relaxation, and a recreation pool with a waterslide at one end and a diving board at the other.

The pool will be covered by a dome that will be installed in the fall and removed in the spring. The dome will be purchased from and constructed by **The Farley Group** of Canada. The company specializes in air-supported recreation structures in northern climates. This allows outdoor swimming in the summer and indoor swimming in the colder months, at a fraction of the cost of a steel building. The setup is similar to the pool covering at **Smugglers' Notch Resort** in Vermont which has been in use for several years.

•

Marshfield, Wisconsin's new **Vandehey Waters Aquatic Center** opened to the public on July 23, 2021. The $7 million facility features three slides, two diving boards, a climbing wall, basketball hoops, a full concession stand, family changing rooms, private changing stalls, a family shelter, a game area, current channel, a grass area, shade structures and plenty of lounge chairs.

The new, state-of-the-art facility replaced the 85-year-old **Hefko Pool**. The aquatic center was funded by the city and private donations with each source contributing $3.5 million.

•

The **El Corazon Aquatics Center** in Oceanside, California, held its grand opening on August 22. The aquatic center has been in the works for six years, although its roots go back further than that. Oceanside acquired property in 1994 for what was to become **El Corazon Park**. However, nine years passed before the council approved a master plan. In October 2019 the City Council approved funding for the $19.8 million aquatic facility and awarded the contract to **PC Construction** of San Diego. Groundbreaking took place shortly thereafter and construction began on the first city public pool in more than 60 years. Construction also began on a new Senior Center.

The aquatics center is designed for recreational and competitive uses by Oceanside residents and school districts, and to host regional swim competitions. The center will be open year-round and includes a 56-meter competition pool; diving boards; a warm-water, instructional and therapy pool; children's splash pad; concession area; locker rooms and spectator seating as well as administrative offices, meeting rooms and large, multipurpose events center.

The swim center is on the eastern end of the city's 465-acre El Corazon Park, located next-door to the senior center and near the 20-field soccer complex. Future plans for the park include a pickleball court, dog park, bike and walking trails, basketball courts and additional sports fields.

In June, testing of equipment turned up some mechanical issues with the circulation pumps, but the issue was resolved in time to allow a soft-opening on August 2.

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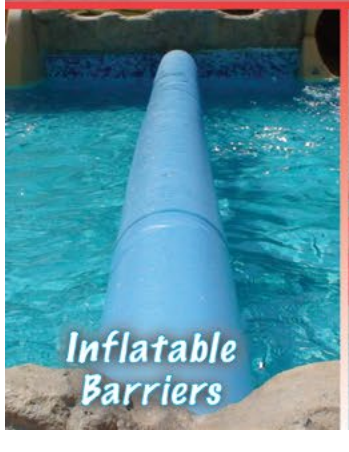
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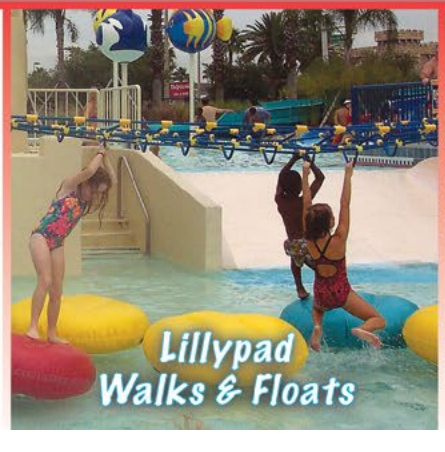
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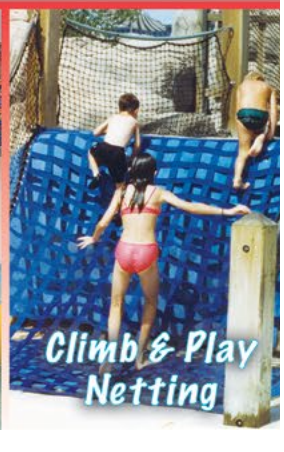
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2021 IAAPA Expo Europe to showcase industry and Barcelona

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
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BARCELONA, Spain — The decision of the **International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA)** to go on with the show — the 2021 **IAAPA Expo Europe** that is, set for Sept. 27-30 in Barcelona — was not taken lightly. The ongoing pandemic the world is still dealing with alongside recovery efforts were certainly front and center.

But through ongoing meetings with IAAPA's Europe Middle East and Africa (EMEA) advisory committee, as well as other worldwide IAAPA leaders and members, IAAPA officials made the decision.

"This past year has been unlike any other our industry has ever encountered," said IAAPA President and CEO **Hal McEvoy.** "Members have been looking to us to help them push forward so guests around the world can safely return to the fun we are known for. The best way we can do this is by bringing the industry together for our global expos. No matter what stage of reopening, re-emerging or recovery members are in, they will be able to find inspiration, solutions and new connections in Barcelona."

Yes, the show will go on.

And, with that said, organizers for the 2021 IAAPA Expo Europe are excited about the upcoming event where there will be a debut of two new special events along with the other scheduled special events. The educational sessions are packed with informative and time-sensitive information. And the trade show is expected to host more than 600 exhibiting companies from around the world that plan to showcase a wide range of innovation products and services.

The conference will run from Sept. 27-30, with the trade show running Sept. 28-30. The event will be held at the **Fira de Barcelona Gran Via**. The Gran Via boasts state-of-the-art trade show technology and 365,000 square meters of exhibition floor space divided into eight pavilions. That is over 3.9 million square feet.

"As we plan for IAAPA Expo Europe, the health and safety of our exhibitors, attendees and team remain at the forefront of all that we do," said **Jakob Wahl**, executive director and vice president, IAAPA EMEA. "The Fira Barcelona Gran Via is a great partner and they are working with us to ensure we have in place the right safety measures that meet current health guidelines. We also look so forward to bringing industry professionals to Barcelona and sharing some of the area's famous destinations."



Doug Lansky is the 2021 IAAPA Expo Europe keynote speaker. COURTESY IAAPA

IAAPA officials are expecting more than 15,000 leisure professionals from more than 100 countries to be present.

IAAPA officials have continued to keep up with local pandemic mandates and travel restrictions in Spain as well as worldwide. The association developed a FAQ section on its website.

The first day of the conference will be composed of several day-long special events. Those Monday events include a back-stage tour to **PortAventura World,** the IAAPA Safety Institute to be held at PortAventura World, the new IAAPA Sustainability Day at PortAventura, Water Park Day taking place at **Water World** and the Indoor Entertainment Day set for Gran Via.

The Keynote Address will be presented on Tuesday morning, Sept. 28, 9-10 a.m., in the IAAPA Theater at the Gran Via with exhibits opening afterwards.

Keynote speaker this year is **Doug Lansky**, who has spent 20 years as a travel journalist, editor and author. His address, titled "Future-proofing the Attractions Industry," will address how attractions can find a balance between profit and smart preparation, a.k.a. "future-proofing."

The trade show will be open until 6 p.m. on this day.

There will also be educational sessions running simultaneously all day. Some of these topics include: Digital Staff Recruiting, Management and Training; Diversity and Inclusion, We're All Different and That's Normal; the Cashless Facility, Futuristic or Already a Reality?, Going TikTok and Creating Iconic Attractions.



The Opening Reception for the 2021 IAAPA Expo Europe will be held at the Tibidabo park. One of that park's attractions is this Giradabo wheel. It offers views of Barcelona as well as the sea and surrounding areas. This attraction is expected to be open during the event. COURTESY TIBIDABO PARK

Midday, from 12-1 p.m., the special event, CEO Talk, will take place in the IAAPA Theater.

The Opening Reception has been set for this evening. It will run 6:30-9:30 p.m., at **Tibidabo** park. Attractions that will be open for the event include Giradabo, Talaia, Carrousel, Tibiair, Automata museum (guided tour), Interactibi, Embruixabruixes, Crash Cars, Diavolo, Express VR, Castell dels Contes, Piratta and Roller Coaster. There will also be live music.

Another event will kick off Wednesday, Sept. 29. The Leadership Breakfast is set for 8:30-10 a.m., in the IAAPA Theater. The breakfast will open with a 10-minute presentation from **Fernando Aldecoa,** PortAventura World CEO, on the facility's sustainability efforts. Afterward, **Sam Conniff**, a life consultant, will present Leadership with a Twist.

The trade show will run 10 a.m.-6 p.m. this day with educational sessions to run simultaneously. Some of the sessions include: How Zoos are Changing Animals as Part of the Experience; Elevating the Guest Experience — How to Inspire Your Staff to Connect with Guests; Ticketing After the Pandemic, Has it Changed Forever?, Working on an Inclusive F&B Offer: How to Cater to Everyone and Be Positive About It and Cheers to Our Mistakes.

The midday special event this day is the Lunch and Learn with **Dr. Rebecca Homkes,** presenting From Rest to Thrive, Leading a growing journey.

Two other special events will take place on Wednesday, the IAAPA Expo Europe Forum and the Young Professionals Forum. Both will take place in the evening from 6:30-8 p.m.

On Thursday, Sept. 30, the trade show will run from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Another new special event will debut this day, the Lunch and Learn for Young Professionals, set for 12-1:30 p.m. This has been created as a special networking event for IAAPA's young professionals.

There is one educational session this day. The session, How to Develop Your Stories into IP's That Thrive Beyond the Gate, will begin at 11 a.m.

IAAPA is continuing communications regarding the Expo and plans to keep its members up to date on any changes and that includes any travel restriction changes through its website and other IAAPA sources.

•iaapa.org



Several of the special events set for the 2021 IAAPA Expo Europe in Barcelona, Spain, will be held at PortAventura. Here is a look of that park's Dragon Khan and Shambhala coasters. COURTESY PORTAVENTURA

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Chocolatetown U.S.A. home to two day PAPA Summer Meeting

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HERSHEY, Pa. — The annual **Pennsylvania Amusement Parks & Attractions (PAPA)** summer fun meeting, originally slated for **Hersheypark** in 2020, took place July 19 and 20, 2021. Nearly 100 members and guests enjoyed fun, food and fellowship in the park. The focal point was Chocolatetown and the new entrance area, with an exclusive ride session on the 1919 **PTC** #47 Carrousel, Hyperdeck VR Experience (**Major Mega**) and the 210-foot Candymonium, (**Bolliger & Mabillard** hyper coaster).

The first day started with a scramble golf tournament at **Manada Golf Club**, Grantville, Pa., with 19 participants. The winning team, with nine under par, was comprised of **Andy Vogelsong**, **Ralph S. Alberts Co., Inc**: **Jason Mons** and **Josh Hays**, both **S&S Worldwide, Inc.** The outing generated more than $1,000 for the **Barbara J. Knoebel** scholarship fund, coordinated this year by **Pete Barto**, VP of sales and strategic partnerships for **Extreme Engineering**. The fund annually assists student employees of PAPA member organizations in the form of scholarships for educational purposes.

That evening attendees enjoyed a cocktail reception and dinner catered within the 121-acre park. The meal was one of epic proportions — quite the feast for attendees. Numerous entrees were offered at various stations, including various kinds of pasta, a whole smoked pig, spatchcock chicken and a prime rib carving.

Ben Bedard, the executive chef for **Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Company**, explained how the feast came to be: "Hospitality Manager **Jerry Clark** saw what we did in 2015 [the last time the park hosted the meeting], and let us explore and be culinarians. We are more than chicken tenders and fries." Bedard, who has a fine-dining background, is in the process of building a culinary culture with a growing staff, operating as a teaching kitchen. "PAPA was an opportunity to move employees forward," he said.



Waiting on the midway for the evening's festivities to get underway are (from left) Sandra and Jack Mendes, Bob's Space Racers; Ed Hodgdon, Ride Entertainment; Earl Heller, Rides 4 U, Inc.; Leanna Muscato, Knoebels Amusement Resort; Mike Fehnel, Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom; Brad Nesland, B & N Consulting, LLC and Gary Chubb, GC Amusement Consulting, LLC. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

After a delicious breakfast in the same pavilion, board members attended a board meeting. Treasurer **Dick Knoebel**, who typically gives his three-word financial report, "We are solid," was a bit more verbose this go-round: "I've been advised by people in the banking industry that we are definitely solvent!"

Many topics were discussed, starting with whether an associate member can be an officer. **Scott Silar** with Hersheypark said there is nothing in the by-laws about it. **Tom Rebbie**, **Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.,** said Czech Republic-manufactured amusement rides are not up to U.S. power and voltage specifications. This year, seven $1,000 scholarships were awarded to students who are employees at PAPA member organizations. There was talk about possibly raising the number given and/or the amount of each scholarship. In his waterparks report, Silar said things at the moment are "steady as she goes." **Janine Rebbie Matscherz** told board members in her website report that the spring meeting will have an online registration component. She also said website analytics are up from 2019 stats.



All smiles after the board meeting (from left): Janine Rebbie Matscherz, Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc.; Rick Knoebel, Knoebels Amusement Resort; Tom Rebbie, PTCI; John Hallenbeck, IAAPA; Ed Hodgdon, Ride Entertainment; Pete Barto, Extreme Engineering and Karen Staley, Sally Dark Rides. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

Joe James and **Andy Quinn** have resigned from the board. **Joe Stefanyak**, **Ellis & Associates**; **Andrew Wheeler**, **Sesame Place** and **Mark Pauls**, **Kennywood** were welcomed as new board members.

Mike Fehnel, PAPA president and vice president and general manager, **Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom**, was pleased with the event: "[It was] absolutely amazing, after a hiatus caused by COVID-19, everybody was excited to get out and have vibrant communication about everything we've been facing as an industry. The collaboration that came out of this, the conversations that happened throughout the whole event and the amazing job Hersheypark did hosting made it an incredible summer meeting."

The 2021 PACE (Parks and Carnivals Education) ride safety seminar will occur October 25 – 28 at **Bloomsburg University**. Hands-on training (rain or shine) will take place October 26 at **Knoebels Amusement Resort**, Elysburg, Pennsylvania. This annual seminar is held in conjunction with the **Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association (PSSA)** and offers both 24- and 32-hour certification training sessions. The educational portion of the seminar is led by instructors from **National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO).** Inspector testing is also offered for Pennsylvania Certified Inspectors and/or NAARSO levels. For additional information, contact **Gary Chubb** at 717-649-1131 or email srdirmaint@gmail.com

PAPA, formed in 1935, promotes the industry, allows for the exchange of knowledge among members, upholds a good public image and monitors legislation and regulatory concerns. **R.L. Plarr** from Dorney Park served as the first president. In 1946, roller coaster designer **Herbert P. Schmeck** from Philadelphia Toboggan Co., served as president. The 2022 spring meeting will be held at the **Hershey Lodge**, February 20 and 21. The 2022 summer fun meeting will occur at **DelGrosso's Park & Laguna Splash**, July 18 and 19.

• **paamusementparks.com**



The culinary staff at Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Company stand behind a whole pig that was one of the many food stations. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

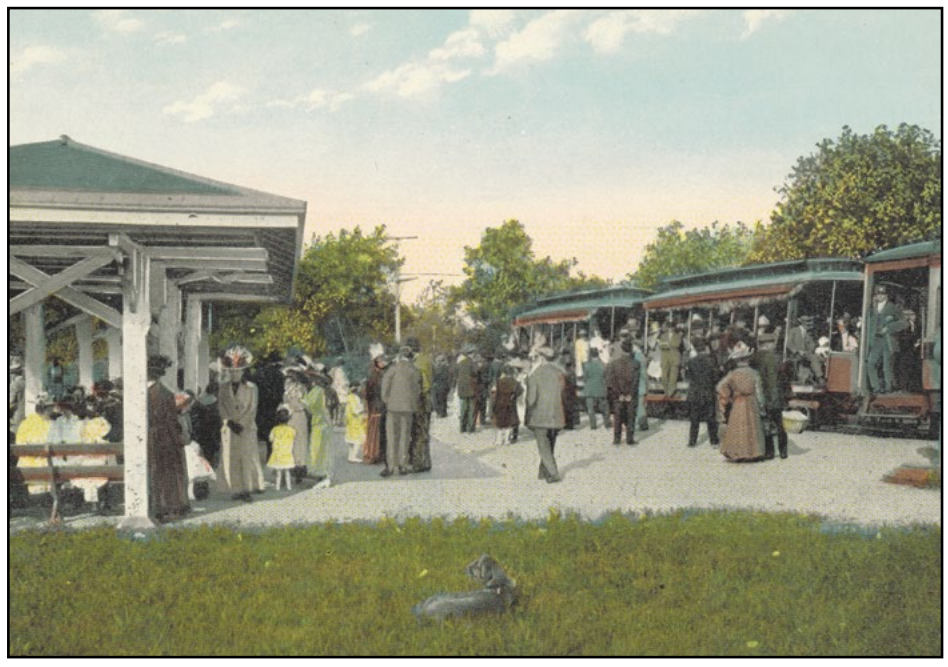


Sporting their Hersheypark swag bags are (from left) Rick Knoebel, Knoebels Amusement Resort; Jeff Davis, Dorney Park & Wildwater Kingdom; Diane Benedict, DB Productions and Mark Pauls, Kennywood. AT/B. DEREK SHAW

Former 'trolley park,' Waldameer celebrates 125 years of operation

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Waldameer owner, Paul Nelson (above left), started his career at the park at a young age. This postcard view (above right) illustrates how early visitors arrived to Waldameer by rail. Young and old find things to ride at Waldameer. COURTESY WALDAMEER; AT/TIM BALDWIN

ERIE, Pa. — Anniversaries are fun moments for celebration, but very few amusement parks can boast being 100 years old. **Waldameer & Water World** celebrates 125 years this season. It is among America's oldest amusement parks.

In 1896, Waldameer started as many parks did in that era by being placed at the end of a trolley line. These so-called "trolley parks" encouraged business on the weekends. As automobiles eventually replaced the demand for trolley services, trolley parks found themselves in decline. Today, only a fraction remain; Waldameer is one of them.

German for "The Woods by the Sea," Waldameer started just as many others did with bandstands, picnic shelters, a beach house and a park atmosphere. As would be expected, rides began appearing at the beginning of the 20th century. While other such parks were lost to history, Waldameer continued to grow and retain its popularity, even with changing times.

Significant moments in the park's history included the Ravine Flyer roller coaster. Built in 1922, the coaster took advantage of the area's terrain, as the name implied, and plunged down the sloped hillside. The introduction of Rainbow Gardens, a dance hall built in 1925 with an ornate, curved ceiling, was highly popular. Following the Depression, Monkey Island was a curiosity added to help lure guests back to the park.

Midway rides came and went, but the park boasts two Bill Tracy creations from the 1970s. The legendary developer created some beloved dark rides, Whacky Shack being one of them. A year later, Tracy returned to install the Pirate's Cove walk-through attraction.



A significant turning point was the introduction of Water World in 1986. As the water park craze swarmed the country, Waldameer wanted in. From two original waterslides, that portion of the park is now a summer attendance driver with numerous slides, heated pools, a large kids area, lazy river, and the largest wave pool in the area.

When Ravine Flyer II opened in 2008, it won Best New Ride in *AT*'s Golden Ticket Awards and continues to be a top ten contender ever since. Its placement — and the fact that it speeds over a highway — makes it one of the nation's most notable coasters.

Perhaps the best fixture at the park is owner **Paul Nelson**. Nelson started his career at the park at a very young age.

In the 1940s, Waldameer was owned by **Alex Moeller**. The Moeller and Nelson family were good friends, and when vacationing from New York, young Nelson was eager to visit. So enamored was he that the Moellers offered to let him stay for the summer and work simple jobs at the park. In subsequent years, that arrangement followed, and Nelson quickly learned the ropes. Following a stint in the Army, Nelson started his permanent career at the park at age 23 and became manager in 1957.

"Mr. Moeller took a real liking to me," said Nelson. "When I was young, he told me he would give me the park if I would do what he told me to do and work for very little. We shook on it. He was tough. But Mr. Moeller kept his word and gave me the park. After my father and uncle died, the Moeller's adopted me so I wouldn't have to pay any inheritance tax."

Waldameer is just up the hill from Presque Isle in Erie. Today Presque Isle State Park is a 3,200-acre sandy peninsula in Lake Erie. The approach to

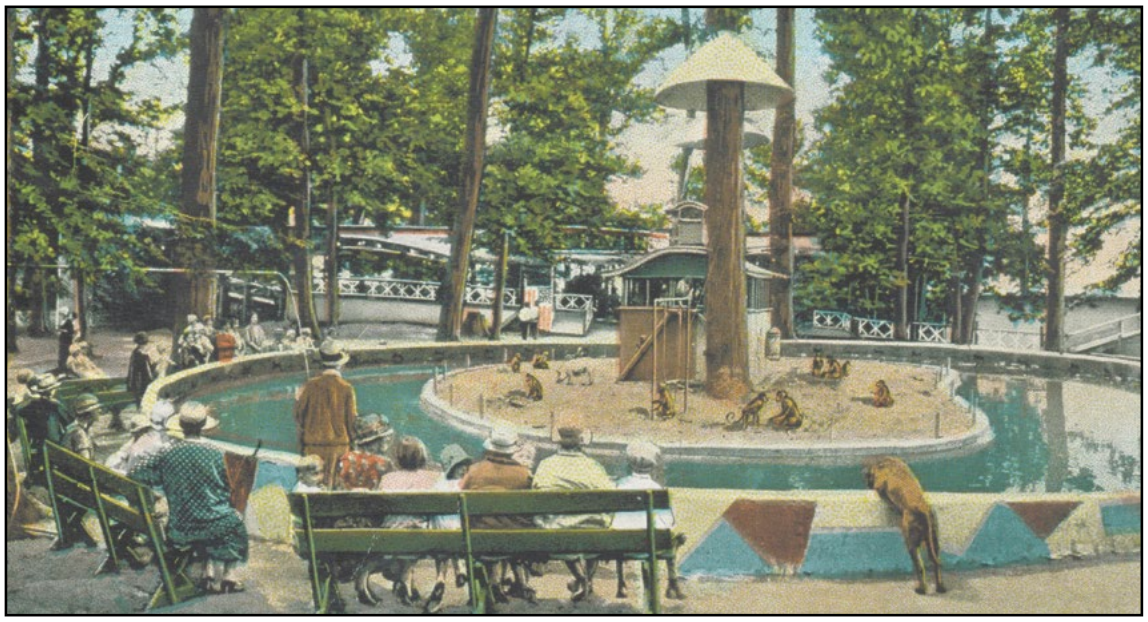
▸ **See WALDAMEER, page 47**







Classic rides, such as this Tumble Bug, appeared the a midway began to attract more crowds (above left). Water World embraced the city's history with the addition of Battle of Lake Erie (above right). Water World offers a different experience than the amusement park. COURTESY WALDAMEER; AT/TIM BALDWIN





Entertainment via animals was a simple addition following the Depression (above left). The Bill Tracy dark ride remains a fan favorite (above right). COURTESY WALDAMEER; AT/TIM BALDWIN

WALDAMEER
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the State Park sends motorists directly under Ravine Flyer II, which travels spectacularly over the highway. Presque Isle is termed as Pennsylvania's "only seashore." The proximity to Waldameer is an advantage for attracting tourists.

"Waldameer's greatest strength is that we've found our niche and strive to embrace it," said General Manager **Steve Gorman**. "Waldameer is a local, family-owned, family-operated and family-oriented amusement park and water park. We understand our rich roots and history. We want to be known as the region's hometown attraction where you can affordably visit, feel safe and have fun for a day. Expanding our geographic market simply is a result of providing that service."

That said, the past two years have thrown the park some challenges.

"The costs to operate and maintain our facility keep rising due to many factors including taxes and government regulations," said Gorman. "Being able to adequately staff the park is increasingly difficult. As we grow, we need more staff, and the local employee base has not grown. Attracting young people to work a summer job is getting more challenging each year."

For a traditional park of its size, adding a water park was a clever move for Nelson in the 1980s.

"I was one of the first people to add a water park," Nelson said. "When waterslides came out, they were poured concrete. My wife and I would travel on our day off to go visit water parks in Florida. I thought if we could get fiberglass ones, I knew it would be big."

Nelson found a company in Erie that could make fiberglass slides. Water World was born — and it was a hit. Even as much as the water park has grown in recent decades, Nelson shared that he still plans to increase its size by 50 percent. "Our water park is like the frosting on the cake," he said. "The amusement park makes the most money, but the water park helps our reputation. We're bigger than anything in Buffalo and Cleveland."

Nelson prides himself on never buying anything second hand. "If you hold onto something long enough and keep it in good shape, you've modified it, and that makes you the manufacturer," he said. "I've always bought brand new stuff." He also won't sell his retired equipment.

Reflecting on 125 years, Gorman knows its not just about what's new. "We are doing our best to maintain and preserve our popular classic older rides like the Comet, Whacky Shack and Pirates Cove," he said. "Continuing to offer free parking, free amusement park admission and a pay-as-you go ride option is important to many of our guests. We don't want to be thought of as a 'hard park,' so we invest in our atmosphere like gardens, statues, fountains, landscaping and many benches to sit and relax."

"We're a part of the community more than most amusement parks," said Nelson. "I want everyone to use our amusement park. You can come in for free and walk around and decide what you want to spend, even if you just want to buy an ice cream cone. We don't charge for parking. You can bring a picnic into our pavilions. We have very loyal customers."



Ravine Flyer II launched the park into a must-do destination for coaster enthusiasts. AT/TIM BALDWIN

Nelson, now 87, shows no signs of slowing down. "I still enjoy what I'm doing," he told *Amusement Today*. "2019 was the very best year we ever had. It was supposed to be my last 10-year plan. Then 2020 … our cash flow was nothing. But I kept all my employees. I didn't let anybody go."

Nelson has always put his staff first. Even after numerous decades, his joy for being in the park still shows.

"A good example of Paul's dedication is that he worked for over a decade to install the Ravine Flyer II wooden coaster, having to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to win the legal challenges to build," noted Gorman. "Never give up on what you want!"







Rainbow Gardens became a popular dance venue in the 1920s (above left). Numerous sculptures are spread throughout Waldameer to add a pleasant park atmosphere (above middle). The park's Ferris wheel offers views of the park and Lake Erie. (above right). COURTESY WALDAMEER; AT/TIM BALDWIN

Embed celebrates 20 years; expands offer for free Mobile Wallet

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SINGAPORE — Twenty years ago, there were just four employees. From that handful of innovators, a large company has grown that has not only serviced the family entertainment sector but also help it evolve. In 2001, the concept of developing a cashless business system spurred this quartet into establishing **Embed**.

In the two decades since, the company has grown internationally as well as technologically. In 2006, the Color-Glo color-changing card reader system won an IAAPA Impact Award. The company's most recent award-winning innovation was in 2020 when its Mobile Wallet was honored with the Operator's Choice Award from the Amusement & Music Operators Association.

The Embed team feels that as technology has evolved, they have remained at the forefront of FEC transformation with its creative innovation and location-based services. **Renee Welsh** steers the company as CEO. She founded **Booking Boss** in 2013, which was acquired by **Helix Leisure**, a mix of industry insiders and next generation IT. Embed is one of its companies.

"It's the people who make the industry of fun so extraordinary," said Welsh. "A highlight is working with our industry tech partners — Apple, Google, and Amazon — who support us to architect and trailblaze the technological future of the FEC.

"People are embracing contactless payment technologies — getting used to paying via their mobile phones. This kind of transaction was already happening before the pandemic. My foresight is that the ever-changing consumer behavior will continually opt for this safer and easier way to pay in the years to come; it's a no brainer.

"Businesses have to adapt to a post-pandemic world and the new mindset of visitors. Consumers are worried about keeping their families COVID-free. They don't want to touch cash and coins — which can carry living germs and viruses for days. They want to minimize contact with other people while standing in line at POS, the prize redemption counter, or topping up their game cards," Welsh said.

Welsh takes pride in Embed being one of the first female-led organizations in the FEC industry.

"When I first started out in this industry, female representation in the tech and family FEC sectors was unheard of. This is particularly true in the FEC sector, which is male-dominated. That is why after I became a female CEO of a company in the tech industry, I have continued to push for greater female representation, especially at the C-Suite level," she said. "I'm proud to say that 50 percent of our leadership team is female, when half of start-ups have no women on their leadership teams."

To talk with Welsh, it is apparent that she is extremely proud of the company's commitment to both gender and cultural equality in the technical sector. The company's workforce is an exemplary wealth of different backgrounds and perspectives in its diversity.

Assisting FECs during the pandemic, Embed offered its award-winning Mobile Wallet to operators for free. Now during the 20th anniversary celebration, Embed is extending that offer to customers for another year.

"When we implemented our COVID-19 Relief Act and gave our award-winning Mobile Wallet free in 2020, we received very positive feedback from existing and new customers on how our solutions helped them recover, prosper, and thrive during the pandemic; driving return customer visits and future-proofing their business," said Welsh. "So it was a no-brainer to give the Mobile Wallet for free as our Embed 20th anniversary gift to the industry."



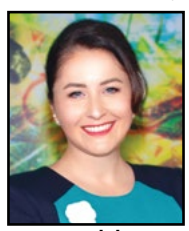
Embed offers a variety of contactless payment options for its clients, including the popular Mobile Wallet (far right) which the company is offering for free to its customers. To celebrate its anniversary, Embed sent a commemorative game card to clients and associates (below). COURTESY EMBED



The ease of installation, along with no app download requirement, is one of the reasons Mobile Wallet has been well received in the industry. The global pandemic has reinforced the desire for low-touch scenarios and cashless payments.

Spearheaded by Embed, the game card was an innovation in cashless technology. For its 20th anniversary, the company has produced anniversary-themed cards that are customizable for clients to make the game card even more of a collectible keepsake and a popular tangible item to drive return business.

"Embed's 20th anniversary limited edition game cards are given out to our customers in celebration of 20 years in the industry," Welsh said. "Embed already customizes game card designs for our customers, on top of our cutting-edge range of card designs and RFID wearables that come with embossed graphics, printed in full color on a shimmering metallic base. Embed also makes natural and organic game cards printed on real wood. These winning card collections are sure to become collectibles and inspire a cult following."


Welsh

Amusement Today asked Welsh how the family entertainment center has changed over the past 20 years. She replied: "In the tech-driven world we live in, it's all about the experience economy. It is very simple: it's not enough to offer goods and services and call it a day. Consumers expect a highly immersive experience, with an inferred expectation to ease and the immediacy to game play and fun. They don't want to waste time waiting around in lines.

"They use technology to make their lives easier, so they make reservations and bookings via mobile and in real-time. They expect businesses like restaurants, FECs, cinemas, and attractions to value their time — shortening wait times upon customer arrival, preparing a party, food, and beverages ahead of time, and so on. They want their gaming experience maximized — game cards topped up without standing in line at a kiosk, wallet-in-hand; they want to top up their game card on their mobile phone without leaving the game, having all their information on their mobile phone, so they don't need to walk across the venue to check their balance or prize redemption tickets. This is advantageous to the operator because it keeps the consumer engaged without disruption, which is an operationally efficient way to generate revenue."

From a humble tech startup, the company is now an industry leader in integrated, cloud-based business solutions that enable operators to thrive in increasing profitability and achieve greater efficiency while reducing costs. Embed now serves a diverse customer base of more than 1,000 clients in 56 countries, with a total of more than 3,000 cashless business management system installations.

"There's no doubt that the FEC industry requires an integrated business platform to enable, empower and ease businesses in growing their revenue, streamlining their operations and maximizing their profits — especially in such difficult times," said Welsh. "With Embed's legacy in innovation, we look forward to reimagining the business of fun and revolutionizing the FEC sector."

•embedcard.com

Mobile Wallet

EMBED

The Power of Touch in the Time of Pandemic



When consumers demanded for a contactless, low-touch economy during the pandemic, integrated cloud-based business solution platform **Embed** launched their **Mobile Wallet** as a response to the need for safer and more seamless customer experience, eliminating disruptions to fun while increasing their client's bottom line. Staying true in its commitment to the FEC industry, Embed is giving away their Mobile Wallet for free this year.

The virtual gamecard **Mobile Wallet** is the only Apple iOS and Google Android-certified solution in the industry, making Embed the only non-banking, non-loyalty, and non-financed brand to sit in the consumers' mobile wallet.



With the same functionality as a gamecard, it can be added to the user's mobile wallet - no other app download is required - allowing customers to reload with ease anytime, anywhere without leaving their game. No more long lines, multiple transactions between games, and touching cash or coins. Operators then can drive return visits and gain access to data showing customer behavior, usage, and spending habits.

The **Mobile Wallet** also has APIs available to be linked to any FEC's mobile app, making it a flexible business partner. It will prove to be a useful tool for operators as they reopen their businesses and rebuild trust with customers.

TAP. RELOAD. PROFIT.

- Contactless transactions on mobile phones
- Quick game card top-up or reload for guests anytime, anywhere without leaving the game
- APIs available to link to any FEC's mobile app

CAPACITY MANAGEMENT

- No more long kiosk lines
- Cuts down crowding at the entrance
- Seamless in-venue guest experience

COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING

- Receive alerts for every registered patron who tests positive for COVID-19, including games play, time, and date of visit
- Trace guests who were in close contact
- Ensure guest and employee safety







> When Embed introduced the **Mobile Wallet**, it seemed like a good opportunity for us to jump in and see what it was all about. There's nothing not to like about it. It's clever and very convenient; you don't have to visit a kiosk or a staff member, you do everything from the comfort of your phone.
>
> **Doug & LaNeta Roth**
> Owners
>
> Scary Strokes

> We want to be on the cutting-edge for our guests and **Embed** took on the challenge. We approached Embed because we want Apple and Android phones to be able to have a digital card that can process game transactions using that phone. Nobody else in the industry has that. Two different companies came together and produced something that the industry has not seen.
>
> **Pete Stearns**
> Senior Director, Midway Operations
>
> FUNZONE ARCADE

> The **Kiosk** is, by far, the most valuable tool in the Pizza Ranch FunZone arcade. It's very durable and has a good guest interface. We've seen 80-90% of all transactions going through the Kiosk instead of the POS.
>
> **Mark Souba**
> Chief Development Officer
>
> DAVE & BUSTER'S

> With the help of **Embed**, we're able to provide a seamless and consistent guest experience at each of our locations, while simultaneously meeting superior operating standards. We've seen 300% growth in locations with 360 card readers in all locations.
>
> **Joey Slawinski**
> Director of Operations
>
> APEX ENTERTAINMENT

www.embedcard.com

MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 08/19/21	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	110.37	117.65	49.26
Cedar Fair, L.P.	FUN	NYSE	42.66	52.50	24.48
Comcast Corp./NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	58.96	59.70	40.96
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	173.25	203.02	117.23
Dubai Parks & Resorts	DXBE:UH	DFM	0.08	0.15	0.07
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	47.21	56.07	20.62
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	4365.00	6500.00	3065.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.88	1.30	0.38
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	17.65	23.05	14.50
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	37.66	45.34	19.55
Royal Carribean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	76.50	99.24	51.33
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	JP:6357	TYO	766.00	875.00	566.00
SeaWorld Entertainment, Inc.	SEAS	NYSE	47.85	58.26	18.29
Six Flags Entertainment Co.	SIX	NYSE	38.03	51.75	18.55
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	858.00	944.00	620.00

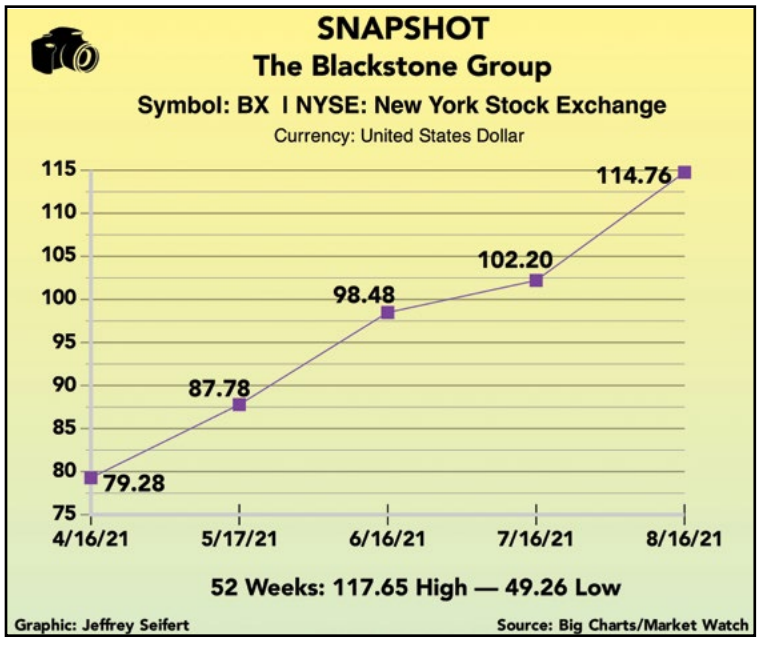
STOCK PRICES ABOVE ARE GENERALLY QUOTED IN THE FOREIGN CURRENCY IN WHICH THE COMPANY IS LOCATED

Worldwide Markets: ASX, Australian Securities Exchange; **CSE**, Copenhagen Stock Exchange; **LSE**, London Stock Exchange; **NYSE**, New York Stock Exchange; **NASDAQ**, National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; **SEHK**, Hong Kong Stock Exchange; **SZSE**, Shenzhen Stock Exchange; **TSEC**, Taiwan Stock Exchange, Corp.; **TYO/TSE**, Tokyo Stock Exchange

—SOURCES: Bloomberg.com; Wall Street Journal



Six Flags Theme Parks announced that the chain's popular Fright Fest events will return to its parks this fall.
COURTESY SIX FLAGS PARKS



DIESEL PRICES

Region (U.S)	As of 8/16/21	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	$3.316	$0.808
Midwest	$3.259	$0.951
Gulf Coast	$3.073	$0.896
Mountain	$3.657	$1.292
West Coast	$3.682	$1.096
California	$4.319	$1.055

CURRENCY

On 8/19/21 $1 USD =	
0.8536	EURO
0.7270	GBP (British Pound)
109.73	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.9154	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.3794	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.2628	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

SeaWorld reports second quarter

ORLANDO — **SeaWorld Entertainment**'s second quarter 2021 financial results continued to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While 10 of the company's 12 parks were open at the beginning of the second quarter, all parks were operating with capacity limitations and/or modified/limited operations — compared to none of its 12 parks open at the beginning of the second quarter in 2020. By the end of the second quarter, all 12 parks were open, all operating without COVID-19 related-capacity limitations (compared to 7 of its 12 parks at the end of the second quarter of 2020, as the company began the phased reopening of some of its parks with capacity limitations and modified/limited operations, starting in June 2020).

"I am pleased to report that, despite continuing to operate in a highly challenging and COVID-19 impacted environment, momentum from the first quarter continued into the second quarter and we delivered strong second quarter financial results — including record revenue, net income and adjusted EBITDA," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of SeaWorld Entertainment, Inc. "Our strong financial performance through the first half of the year underscores both the resilience of our business and our commitment to emerge from this extraordinary environment an even stronger and more profitable business."

In the second quarter of 2021, the company hosted approximately 5.8 million guests, generated record total revenues of $439.8 million, record net income of $127.8 million and record Adjusted EBITDA of $218.8 million. Attendance declined 0.7 million guests when compared to the second quarter of 2019 primarily due to COVID-19 related impacts including capacity limitations and/or modified/limited operations at our parks for some of the quarter. The increase in total revenue of $33.8 million was primarily a result of increases in admission per capita and in-park per capita spending partially offset by the decline in attendance.

Six Flags compares latest financials to 2019

ARLINGTON, Texas — **Six Flags Entertainment Corporation** reported attendance of 8.5 million and revenue of $460 million for second quarter 2021. Results for second quarter 2021 are not directly comparable to the same prior-year period due to the COVID-19-related suspension of operations and operating restrictions that began in mid-March 2020. Therefore, the company believes it is most relevant to compare its results in the second quarter of 2021 to the second quarter of 2019.

As expected, due to the continuing effects of the pandemic, the company reported lower attendance for second quarter 2021 compared to the same period in 2019. Attendance was 8.5 million guests, a decrease of 2.0 million compared to second quarter 2019. Total Revenue was $460 million, a decrease of $17 million compared to second quarter 2019. As of May 29, the company had opened all its parks, and, as of June 15, none of the parks were subject to mandated capacity constraints, with the exception of the theme park in Montreal and the two parks in Mexico.

"Our results this quarter are due to the dedication of our team members, who really pulled together to safely reopen our parks," said Mike Spanos, president and CEO. "While the operating environment continues to be challenging, we are encouraged by the initial progress on our transformation plan, which contributed to our improving revenue and guest spending per capita trends."

Disney ends third quarter in strong position

BURBANK, Calif. — **The Walt Disney Company** reported earnings for its third fiscal quarter ended July 3, 2021. Diluted earnings per share (EPS) from continuing operations for the quarter was income of $0.50 compared to a loss of $2.61 in the prior-year quarter. Diluted EPS for the quarter increased to $0.80 from $0.08 in the prior-year quarter. Diluted EPS from continuing operations for the nine months ended July 3, 2021 increased to income of $1.02 compared to a loss of $1.17 in the prior-year period. Diluted EPS for the nine months decreased 14% to $1.91 from $2.22 in the prior-year period.

"We ended the third quarter in a strong position, and are pleased with the company's trajectory as we grow our businesses amidst the ongoing challenges of the pandemic," said **Bob Chapek**, chief executive officer, The Walt Disney Company. "We continue to introduce exciting new experiences at our parks and resorts worldwide, along with new guest-centric services, and our direct-to-consumer business is performing very well."

ON THE MOVE

Tom Chiarella of **Gateway Ticketing Systems** has been promoted to executive vice president and head of product, reaffirming the Executive Leadership. The promotion comes shortly after he was named one of The *Lehigh Valley Business Journal*'s Forty under 40 in 2021.

Chiarella joined Gateway in 2014 as a Program Manager and in 2016 became a Team Lead of Software Development. In 2017, he was promoted to Sr. Manager, Product Development where he strategically grew the Product Development team and improved Galaxy's maintenance and release cycle. Additionally, Chiarella used his customer-facing experience to help improve communication standards and response times of the customer service team to better serve Galaxy users.


Chiarella

"Tom's ability to balance customer needs with our future vision of the product, to manage a large team, and to contribute immensely to the financial responsibility of Gateway, leaves no doubt in my mind that he is prepared to take even more responsibility over the product and lead our company successfully into the future," said **Michael Andre**, president and CEO of Gateway Ticketing Systems.

"As we continue to witness the rebound of our industry, it's an incredibly exciting time to work more closely with Michael on the long-term strategy and drive the execution of the company," added Chiarella.

Brad Nesland recently retired as vice president of maintenance & construction for **Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom**, a position he held for 16 years. He recently opened **B&N Consulting, LLC** in Allentown, Pennsylvania.


Nesland

Prior to Dorney, Nesland worked for **Knott's Berry Farm**, Buena Park, California and the **Bicycle Hotel & Casino** in Bell Gardens, California. He currently serves on the **Pennsylvania Ride Safety Advisory Board** and is a **NAARSO** Level 3 Inspector. B&N Consulting provides monthly attraction inspection with affidavits along with providing maintenance best practices, attraction up time improvement, staffing level evaluation and short term interim maintenance management.

After 40 years marketing and promoting the **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk**, **Marq Lipton** is stepping down as the **Santa Cruz Seaside Company**'s vice president of marketing and sales and transitioning to the role of executive adviser.

During his time leading the marketing team, the historic amusement park grew from a popular local and regional attraction to a nationally and internationally recognized attraction that garnered attention and awards from media, the travel industry, and amusement park experts worldwide. In 2019 the Boardwalk attracted close to 3 million visitors, making it Northern California's most popular amusement park.


Lipton

"Marq has been instrumental in shaping the identity and character of the Boardwalk and its legacy during his successful career," said Santa Cruz Seaside Company President **Karl Rice**. "I am thankful that we will still be able to draw upon Marq's many years of industry and institutional knowledge to shape our future."

Lipton has been active within the Santa Cruz community and was recognized in 2009 for those efforts as the Aptos Man of the Year. He has served and held leadership positions on many local and professional boards and organizations, including **Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council**, **Second Harvest Food Bank**, **Northern California Attractions Association**, **Santa Cruz County Cultural Council**, **Santa Cruz County Marine Sanctuary Inter-Agency Task Force**, **Pajaro Valley Unified School District**'s Committee of 12, and **Temple Beth El Jewish Community Center.** Currently, Lipton serves on the advisory board of **Second Harvest Food Bank** and serves on the *Santa Cruz Sentinel Editorial* advisory board.

The park also announced that **Omid Aminifard**, Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk's vice president of operations, has been promoted to the position of general manager and vice president of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. Aminifard will lead multiple departments of the 114-year-old beachfront amusement park, including Operations, Maintenance/Development, Security/Safety, Food and Beverage, Information Technology/Entertainment, Marketing/Sales, and multiple concessionaire operators.


Aminifard

"Omid has been a valuable contributor during his time at the Boardwalk and has become a respected leader in our Company and also within the amusement park industry," said Rice. "With Omid's experience, insight, expertise, and management abilities, the Boardwalk is well positioned for expanded success into the future."

Aminifard began his 36-year attractions career while a high school student as a park host at **SeaWorld San Diego**. His professional career began in Las Vegas as a member of the opening team for three resorts, eventually becoming the director of-operations at the **Stratosphere Hotel and Casino**. Joining the Boardwalk as the director of arcades and attractions in 2000, he was promoted six years later to director of boardwalk operations and was promoted to VP of boardwalk operations in 2015.

SeaWorld Entertainment Inc. announced that **Tom Iven**, its chief operating officer of about 40 days, resigned for personal reasons, effective August 12, 2021.

Iven continued to assist the company through Aug. 20.

Prior to joining the SeaWorld, Iven served as senior vice president of park operations for **Six Flags Entertainment Corp.** He was responsible for the operations management of all of Six Flags' parks and properties. Iven began his career at Six Flags as a seasonal employee and had a career spanning several decades. Iven served in key operating and leadership roles both at the park and corporate level.


Iven

OBITUARIES

Barbara Thompson, Blackpool Pleasure Beach director, passes

LYTHAM, U.K. — Blackpool Pleasure Beach director Barbara Thompson passed peacefully at her home at the age of 82.

Born Barbara Joan Foxcroft in 1939, the matriarch of Blackpool Pleasure Beach married Geoffrey Thompson OBE in 1962. Geoffrey then became managing director of Blackpool Pleasure Beach in 1976 (he passed away in 2004).


Babara Thompson

Thompson leaves three children, Amanda Thompson OBE, Nicholas Thompson and Fiona Gilje, and eight grandchildren.

"Following her husband's death in 2004, Barbara remained an active and much-loved member of the Blackpool Pleasure Beach family," said a spokesperson from Blackpool Pleasure beach. "She will be greatly missed by everyone at Blackpool Pleasure Beach and within the attractions industry worldwide."

As an active member of the Lady Taverner's, Thompson was a dedicated fundraiser and supported the children's charity for many years. Former television presenter Judith Chalmers, a fellow member of the Lady Taverner's, paid tribute to her friend, saying: "Barbara and the family made everyone so welcome whenever the Lady Taverner's visited the Pleasure Beach.

Former president of Western Fairs Association, Thaxter Trafton, dies

CAMDEN, Maine — Thaxter R. Trafton, of Rockland, Maine, passed away with his wife, Linda, by his side on July 25, 2021, from complications of Lewy body disease. He was 84.


Trafton

Thaxter was born in Danforth, Maine, on January 5, 1937, to Leone Fitzpatrick and Elton Trafton.

Thaxter became the Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Bangor from 1965 until 1980, including five years as the Executive Director of Bass Park, which included the Bangor State Fair and Raceway operation and the overseeing the building of the Bangor Civic Center. In 1980, he was named the Director of the Arizona Veterans Memorial Coliseum and the Arizona State Fair. During his tenure, he also served as the president of the Western Fairs Association. His lifelong affinity for sports was realized from 1985 to 1988 as president of the NBA Cleveland Cavaliers, during which time he accomplished several notable NBA firsts in professional sports administration. After serving as president of the RACAM amusement company in Phoenix, Arizona, he became the owner and president of Trafton & Associates, which operated the Santa Monica pier amusements and Shamrock Shows in southern California.

Korean War veteran, longtime Showman Gehrie Lee Aten passes

CAMDEN, Maine — Gehrie Lee Aten passed away on July 23 at age 90. Gehrie was born on February 13, 1931 in Jackson, Michigan, to Arthur and LaVern (Warfield) Aten, and was the oldest of three children. On June 5, 1970, he married Norma (Garcia) Aten, and they raised two children, Robert Aten and Norma (Aten) Cockerham.


Aten

Aten was a member of the United States Marine Corps and served the United States in the Korean War. Following his service, he opened up a popcorn stand, working various fairs, festivals and events throughout the country. He eventually became the owner of the third largest traveling fair in the country and was a longtime member of the Showmen's League of America.

He cherished his family and loved spending time with them, sharing stories of all his adventures.

Women INFLUENCE

Cindy Emerick

Executive Vice President, Business Development
Dynamic Attractions
Orlando, Florida



A view from the top...

Dynamic Attractions designs, builds and maintains ride and attraction-related systems for the some of the world's top theme parks.

The company originated in 1926 as **Vancouver Art Metal**. After various changes to both name and product types over the years, the company entered the attractions industry in 1998.

Cindy Emerick Whitson joined Dynamic Attractions in early 2013.

Accomplishments and affiliations...

- **Member, IAAPA, received IAAPA Certified Attractions Executive (ICAE)**
- **Member AIMS**
- **Member ASTM**
- **Member, TEA (Themed Entertainment Association)**
- **Member, Ohio Ride Safety Board**

Attractions industry hits home run knocking on Emerick's door

WEST ELKTON, Ohio — Most fifth grade girls weren't contemplating their long-term careers in 1980. Yet, Cindy Emerick Whitson had already figured it out at the age of 10. She knew she wanted to be an engineer.

At that time, she had already developed a strong mechanical aptitude and that only grew as she got older. She had already been exposed to and was developing an entrepreneurial attitude working alongside her father, Jim Emerick, an industrial engineer graduate from Purdue University who owned KE Industrial Repair Inc.

Her interest in engineering didn't wane in high school.

After graduating from Preble Shawnee High School, Emerick attended Ohio State University and Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, receiving her Bachelor of Science in Material Science and Engineering degree. In addition to her college classes, she won a special internship at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton in the Ceramic Material Research Division.

During her college years, she supported herself and paid for college by waiting tables in a small, high-end restaurant, The Meadows, in Middletown, Ohio. While there, she met Tom Yamada, president of Togo International Inc., a Japanese amusement ride company that built roller coasters, giant wheels, carousels, flumes, dark rides and sky cycles.

She couldn't have guessed at the time how important that server position would be for her future. It not only opened the door to a network opportunity but also led to her first job in the amusement industry.

"I wasn't seeking a job in the attractions industry," she said. "It found me. Mr. Yamada hired my father and me to install the pneumatic system on a new prototype coaster he was building. Just before graduation, Mr. Yamada asked me to join his company permanently. He loved that I saw no boundaries with my responsibilities."

Emerick, as the manager of engineering for Togo, instantly became involved in all aspects of the company's business: project management, engineering, accounts payable and receivable, and parts and service. Togo, with its history of designing numerous types of attractions, gave Cindy the perfect foundation of processes and ride acumen to build on.

"I know this experience with Togo was paramount to the success of my career to date, " Emerick said.

She was involved in projects such as: Viper at Six Flags Great Adventure (Prototype, first Heartline Roller Coaster); Manhattan Express at New York-New York Hotel and Casino (203-foot hypercoaster); and Windjammer Surf Racers, Knott's Berry Farm (twin looping mouse coaster).

After seven successful years at Togo, she migrated to Premier Rides, another innovative roller coaster manufacturing company, as the senior technical project director. During her 13-year stint at Premier, she led the charge on numerous new technologies and design philosophies that are now common in the industry: magnetic braking, Linear Induction Motors (LIM), Single Linear Induction Motors (SLIM), Linear Synchronous Motors (LSM), lap bars for roller coaster with inversions, machined chassis, axles and bogies for roller coaster vehicles and more.

Her broad experience at Premier included several noteworthy projects: the Yamaha Racing Coaster in Indonesia; the Sky Rocket Coaster, Kennywood, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and the Mummy coasters at Universal; and the Backlot Stunt Coasters in Cincinnati, Ohio, Richmond, Virginia, and Toronto, Canada, the latter winning an IAAPA Brass Ring Award for best new product.

She continued to broaden her skills and industry network, working on many other projects, including service, touching dozens of other ride manufacturers in the industry.

In early 2013, Emerick heard about Dynamic Attractions splitting off from their sister company, Dynamic Structures, and joining the amusement industry as the newest ride manufacturer. And that enticed and excited Emerick.

"Dynamic had a clean platform on what they wanted to create for the industry, they had a skilled team of engineers, and they had a fantastic fabrication facility," she said.

She joined Dynamic as the director of technical development and led the team to create the company's new core products and assisted with Business Development. She has been the executive vice president, business development, for the last six years, and still toils on the technical side when clients want to create something new.

Emerick witnessed rapid growth in both projects and staff. She is proud of the innovated products they have developed, engineered and produced over the last eight years, generating more than $500 million in revenue. And Emerick and the team at Dynamic have many attractions opening over the next few months.

Emerick said what motivates her the most is collaborating with other talented individuals on designing and opening world-class attractions as well as tapping in on cutting edge of innovation for the industry.

"We create fun," she said. "It's just that simple, and that is reward enough. I get to make people smile for a living."

Emerick and her husband, Rick Whitson, have two children, a 15-year-old daughter and a 17-year-old son. Both love the industry and will likely find their niche careers within it.

Cindy attributes her success to the many great mentors she has had along her career journey. She is looking forward to creating and delivering many new rides systems and attractions for the world to enjoy.

"I love the industry and the community is part of my family. I am humbled to be a part of it."

—Pam Sherborne

Six Flags New England hosts, more than 100 attend NEAAPA Summer Meeting

AGAWAM, Mass. — After taking a hiatus in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis, 120 members of the **New England Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions** (NEAAPA) met for the organization's 108th Anniversary Summer Meeting at **Six Flags New England** on August 3, 2021.

NEAAPA Secretary **Ed Hodgdon** suggested that the gathering had the best turnout in recent memory.

A tour of the newly-themed DC Universe was conducted by Six Flags Communications Manager **Jen McGrath**, who also held a question-and-answer session. **Mike Nuizel**, park engineer, conducted a behind-the-scenes look at how Cyclone — the facility's signature wooden coaster — was transformed into Wicked Cyclone.

John Hallenbeck, vice president and executive director of the **International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions** (IAAPA) North America, provided an update on IAAPA affairs during an afternoon NEAAPA Board of Directors meeting.

Following a social hour, NEAAPA President **Dave Oberlander** and Six Flags New England President **Pete Carmichael** welcomed those in attendance at the start of the dinner.

Among those at the gathering were NEAAPA Hall of Fame members **John** and **Beth Bowen**. John is also a past president of the association and Beth served as secretary for many years. The Bowens owned and operated the former **Whalom Park** in Lurenburg, Mass.

Past Presidents **Stephen Lipkin**, **Carl Berni**, **Ed Connor**, **Kevin Naughton** and **Eric Anderson** were also in the group.

Sponsors included event sponsor **Premier Rides** as well as gift bag sponsors **Extreme Engineering**, **Dippin' Dots**, **Bass Resort Sales**, **Carousel Family Fun Center** and **Gateway Ticketing Systems**. The event's name badges were sponsored by **High Mountain Enterprises**.

Next year's summer meeting will be at **Santa's Village**, Jefferson, New Hampshire, and will include a golf scramble.

•neaapa.com



NEAAPA Hall of Famers Beth and John Bowen — formerly of Whalom Park — attended the organization's summer meeting.
COURTESY NEAAPA



Six Flags New England President Pete Carmichael welcomes NEAAPA to its summer meeting at the park. The event returned in 2021 after taking a hiatus in 2020 due to the ongoing pandemic.
COURTESY NEAAPA



NEAAPA President Dave Oberlander (Centerplate Sports & Leisure) welcomes the group to the summer meeting. The renewed event enjoyed its best attendance in recent years as members were eager to get back to in-person meetings.
COURTESY NEAAPA

Premier Rides reaches 100% vaccination goal



Premier Rides' Sara Seay wears a "Jolene" shirt in honor of Dolly Parton — who initially funded the Moderna vaccine — while husband Jim Seay receives his COVID-19 vaccination. COURTESY PREMIER RIDES

BALTIMORE, Md. — **Premier Rides** announced that its entire organization is fully vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, all new positions will require successful candidates to verify full vaccination prior to starting employment.

"Navigating our way through the pandemic was an unconventional way to celebrate Premier Rides 25th anniversary, but our ability to be nimble, to quickly pivot and ensure continued support to our valued clients demonstrates exactly the dedication we have to our clients and colleagues in our global industry," said **Jim Seay**, president of Premier Rides. "We made a very significant financial investment to make our office safe and with the fantastic staff support there were zero cases as a result of office operations. The natural next step was to become a fully vaccinated organization."

At the onset of the pandemic when many businesses were forced to shutter, Premier Rides developed a strategy that safely allowed the company and its office to remain open for business and fully operational with a combination of in-person and short-term remote staff. COVID-19 protocols were set in place for in person workers while IT quickly set the team up to work from home as needed.

Premier Rides resumed the company-wide 100% in-person office environment by early June 2020 with COVID protocols in place including twice daily temperature checks, restricted access, installation of desk shield partitions, distancing of workstations, increased sanitization and hospital grade air filtration along with a strict mask policy. Team members became ambassadors of COVID safety, sharing with the staff news reports and studies, the progress of the vaccine trials and the eventual availability of vaccines.

The Premier team met together and discussed the importance of being a fully vaccinated team in order to continue to have a safe working environment with fewer of the in-place restrictions and protocols. Additionally, the Premier work environment is highly collaborative from a client standpoint and the team wanted clients to be comfortable whether visiting Premier facilities or having members of the Premier team working at their parks during new ride installations or while performing service.

"I am proud of our team, how they came together during such a difficult time, and I am impressed by their dedication to our clients. Knowing that the vaccine would allow for us to more easily work together and travel to support the projects, everyone at Premier set forth to get vaccinated," stated **Sara Seay**, director of sales and marketing. "The moment an age group was announced to become available, they worked together to find and obtain appointments for each other. There was no question about if they would get it, only a matter of how soon they could get it."

Premier Rides made it easy for the team to get vaccinated by accommodating schedules to make the appointments and by supporting each team member individually in the case of any side effects. Premier also rewarded each employee as a way of thanking them for stepping up to become vaccinated.

•premier-rides.com

SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

AIMS International news and notes — page 58 / V Locker offers solution for Cedar Fair parks — page 60

Cmd-Ctr increases Legoland Windsor ride capacity significantly

AT: *Pam Sherborne*
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

WINDSOR, U.K. — Digital operations platform Cmd-Ctr launched a new range of operational support apps across **Legoland Windsor Resort** about five months ago, and it is already showing promising signs of doing what park officials wanted: increasing ride capacity and minimizing ride downtime.

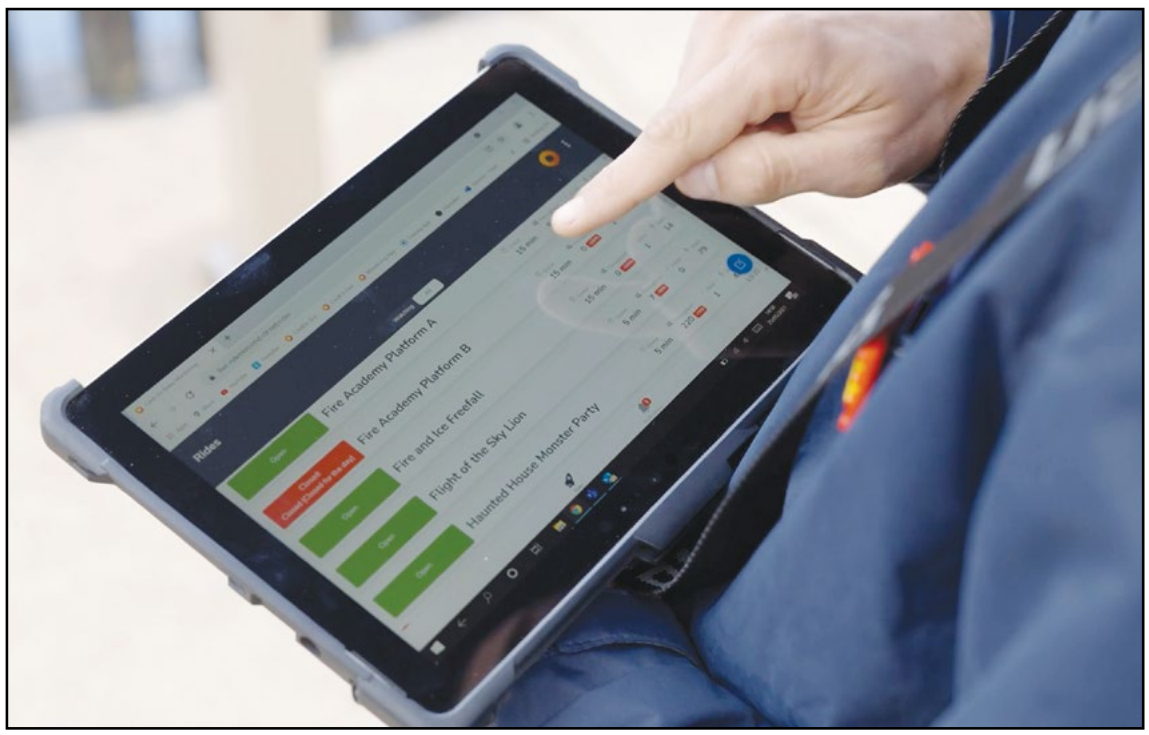
First Option Software, based in Winchester, Hampshire, U.K., created Cmd-Ctr, a cloud-based park operations system that provides instant insights to streamline operations. The system uses digitalization of paper-based work streams to create strategic improvements across theme parks and other attractions.

The system has already seen visitors achieving one additional ride per person. That is a 10% increase over 2020, said **Sam Barnes**, senior rides manager.

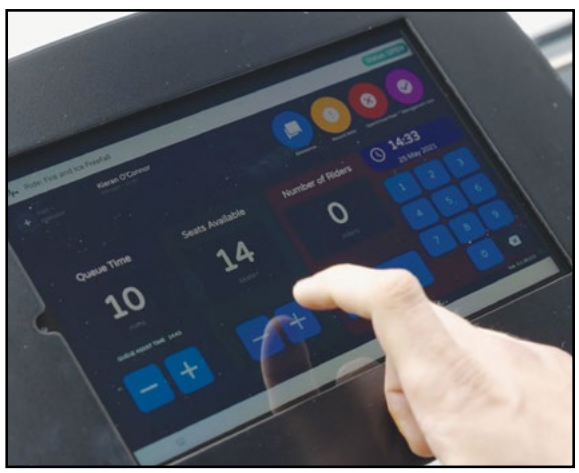
"We're expecting Cmd-Ctr to significantly increase our ride capacity with the efficiencies that this innovative platform provides," Barnes said.

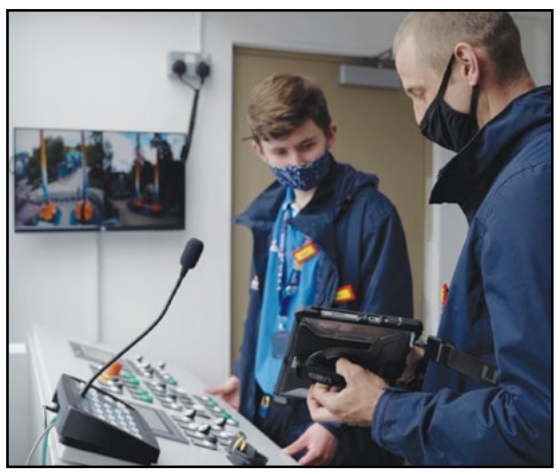
Instead of recording and collating paper-based information, Barnes said the facility's ride managers are identifying operational areas of improvement, which can be seen and resolved as they happen.

"It's made our operations much more effective, reducing our operational ride downtime and given our managers more time to spend with their teams to coach and train staff," he said. "I'm very happy with how this platform has enhanced our performance and ride capacity during a time when COVID restrictions have impacted how we operate and what we're able to achieve."



Digital operations platform Cmd-Ctr launched a new range of operational support apps across Legoland Windsor Resort, about five months ago. Park officials wanted the system to help in operations specifically in increasing ride capacity and minimizing ride downtime. Created by First Option Software, based in Winchester, Hampshire, U.K., the system has already seen visitors achieving one additional ride per person. That is a 10% increase over 2020.
COURTESY FIRST OPTION SOFTWARE





The Cmd-Ctr system is comprised of various modules, each providing enhanced efficiency and oversight for park operations managers. The removal of manual paper-based processes allows for redeployment of staff resources and data insights at the click of a button.

Matt Clarke, director of First Option Software, said that with the global pandemic having a significant impact on theme parks, he feels it is more important than ever that opportunities to streamline operations and maximize efficiency are created.

"Beyond the obvious cost savings, Cmd-Ctr's connected approach brings new opportunities and benefits such as risk reduction, data insights, automation, accountability, staff satisfaction and, of course, guest satisfaction," Clarke said.

With the Cmd-Ctr Ride App, each ride has a dedicated app to manage staff access. No one can log into a ride or operate it if they have not been trained on it. Live data collection and recording is tracked by obtaining peak times, slower queue times and efficiency changes. Operations checks, which are fed directly to engineers and operations managers, track such things as closures and other downtime, incident recording, staff requests such as toilet breaks, water requests and assistance.

The system includes a Monitoring App where ride managers and other field-based roles get access to instant data and will be notified about ride efficiency, incidents, requests and closures/downtime.

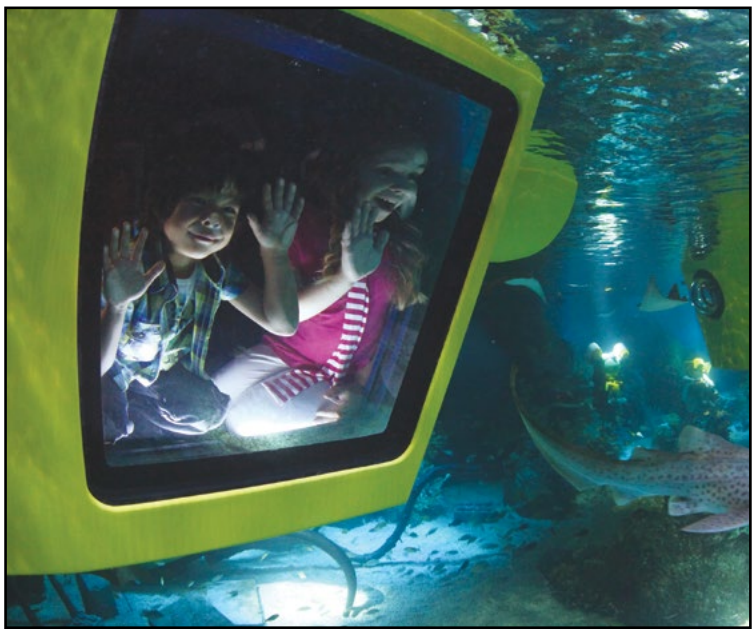
The system's Training App tracks staff training. It is recorded and signed off on digitally by management. That reduces the paper trail and speeds up training processes. Training via the app feeds into the wider system, meaning that ride operators are unable to log into rides they have not been trained on, ensuring safety is prioritized.

The Administration Portal is a central system that provides management teams with full control to configure Cmd-Ctr to their parks. Live

See CMD-CTR, page 55









Legoland Windsor Resort officials are pleased with the operation of their new Cmd-Ctr software sytem. Instead of recording and collating paper-based information, the facility's ride managers are identifying operational areas of improvement, which can be seen and resolved as they happen. It has been installed across the park including areas such as the Lego City Deep Sea Attraction (above middle) and Knight's Kingdom (above right). COURTESY LEGOLAND WINDSOR

CMD-CTR

Continued from page 54

dashboards for multiple teams provide instant oversight of all app data being collected, allowing quicker responses to incidents and problems.

Historic recording of data gives rapid access to reports on past events and insights, giving teams time to make strategic changes that alleviate large queues, pre-empt busy periods and provide additional facilities where they are needed.

In addition to streamlining day-to-day park operations, Cmd-Ctr allows for collection and analysis of data that shapes strategic decision making. Ride managers have identified "unsung hero" rides, which have higher capacities, allowing them to prioritize appropriately when reopening multiple rides to get the highest possible number of guests back onto the rides they came to enjoy.

Karen Glassey, operations director at Legoland Windsor Resort, was already very pleased at how the system was working.

"I'm so pleased with how Cmd-Ctr has had an immediate beneficial impact," Glassey said. "Access to live data, better communication and new insights is benefitting the team as a whole, from ride hosts to managers and beyond. The wider Legoland Windsor Resort team is noticing the positive impacts this system is having and we have the data to prove it."

First Option Software has been providing software development for businesses for 30 years. The Cmd-Ctr system was first created as a custom solution for U.K.'s **Paultons Park**, theh ome of Peppa Pig World. But it was then expanded to be an off-the-shelf software solution, which can be customized to fit a customer's needs.

•cmd-ctr.com



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ODA releases information on recent Cedar Point accident

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio — The **Ohio Department of Agriculture** (ODA) provided a status update on its ongoing investigation into the occurrence at **Cedar Point** on August 15, 2021, in which a woman was seriously injured while standing in line for the Top Thrill Dragster ride.

ODA confirmed that the investigation has determined that an L-shaped bracket, known as a flag plate, which was approximately the size of an adult male's hand, dislodged from the left side of the ride's green train car and struck the victim in the head. Upon inspection, it was determined that half of the bolts which secured the plate to the train body had also dislodged. The Top Thrill Dragster's flag plates are used to communicate to the ride's operating system that the car has passed a portion of the track.

ODA inspectors also found that the brake bracket area of the track, which slows the cars at the end of each ride, showed signs of impact and deformation. Several horizontal track beams also showed signs of impact within approximately 25 feet of the damaged brake bracket.

"ODA takes very seriously the safety of all amusement rides in the state and is saddened by this tragic incident and the impact upon the victim," said ODA Chief of Amusement Ride Safety **David Miran**. "We have spoken with her family to inform them of the status of the investigation, and we will continue to work to determine exactly how the flag plate dislodged."

ODA has sent the green train car to a laboratory which is examining the bolts that remain in the train body. Its report, which is not yet complete, is expected to provide more insight on how the flag plate may have dislodged. ODA also continues to investigate how the damage occurred to the track.

Top Thrill Dragster has ceased operation at Cedar Point during the course of the investigation and pending subsequent reinspection.

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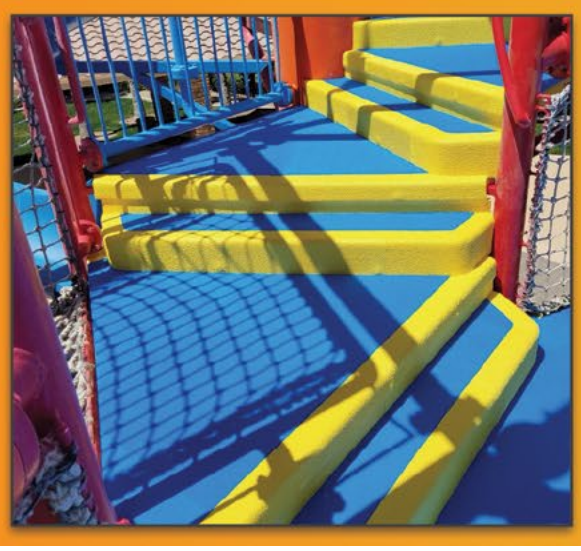
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Save lives with safety education and training

The best way to ensure attraction operators are equipped to avoid and prevent accidents is to create safety awareness through state-of-the-art amusement industry education and employee training. In addition to AIMSconnectED, our online learning platform, **AIMS International** hosts an annual Safety Seminar offering attendees a once-a-year opportunity to learn from industry experts in a week-long educational setting. What sets AIMS apart is the unique opportunity students have to customize their experience, with over 200 live classes across eight disciplines.

Everyone responsible for the care and safety of amusement industry guests will benefit by attending the AIMS International Safety Seminar in Galveston, Texas, January 9-14, 2022. New this year will be an enhanced Operations Track with updated courses custom-curated by **International Ride Training** (IRT). Back by popular demand for a second consecutive year is **Ellis and Associates** (E&A). E&A will once again offer the latest in aquatics safety education in the Aquatics Track. Also returning for a second year will be the Spanish-language Track, where Spanish-speaking safety professionals from Spain, Mexico and other Latin American countries can gather to listen to safety experts deliver, in their native language, the most up-to-date and relevant safety education currently available in the amusement industry. Spanish certification exams are also available at the seminar for those interested in earning a prestigious AIMS International certification in 2022.

AIMS International is proud to announce the new Academy of Amusement Risk Management Safety & Security (AARMSS) which will be hosted for the first time during the 2022 AIMS International Safety Seminar in Galveston, Texas. AARMMS is designed specifically for those with experience working in safety and security management positions and are seeking advanced education opportunities in the areas of Safety and Security Management, Risk Management and Emergency Management. This prestigious two-year academy culminates in the opportunity to sit for a new Amusement Safety & Security Certification exam, which will test knowledge gained through on-the-job experience as well as through the specialized AARMMS curriculum. A limited number of candidates are accepted each year, so be sure to register soon. More information about this innovative new program is available on aimsintl.org/education.

The best of the best manufacturers and suppliers in the amusement industry attend the AIMS Safety Seminar to learn about the latest issues and practices in safety and security. They know they'll benefit by learning from the industry's top experts and gain valuable information and feedback from people who maintain and operate their products and services on a daily basis.

Early-bird registration for the 2022 AIMS International Safety Seminar at just $495 opens September 1 and will be available for a limited time. Full class selection will be available in October. Register now at aimsintl.org where you can also book your hotel room at the Galveston Hilton at the special AIMS rate of $125 per night. On-site certification testing is offered in Maintenance, Operations, Aquatics, and Ride Inspection. Have questions? Email info@aimsintl.org or call 714-425-574.

Space for this AIMS page is provided courtesy of *Amusement Today* as a corporate partner of AIMS Intl. Content is provided by *AT* & AIMS.



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V Locker provides safety solution for Cedar Point, Kings Dominion

AT: *Tim Baldwin*
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com





Provided by V Locker, the dual-sided locker system allows loose articles to be stored free of charge prior to boarding and then retrieved from the exit side minutes later.
AT/TIM BALDWIN

SANDUSKY, Ohio — When Steel Vengeance opened in 2018 at **Cedar Point**, the **Rocky Mountain Construction** coaster wowed audiences and took *Amusement Today*'s Golden Ticket for Best New Ride of 2018.

As wildly popular as the ride was, it was admittedly the park's most out-of-control coaster with its dramatic maneuvers and wild inversions. Loose articles immediately became a safety issue. Cedar Point installed lockers across from the ride's entrance. While this addressed the loose article issue, it created two problems.

First, riders were forced to pay to put simple objects away. Secondly, it separated guests from their phones for long periods of time, depending upon the length of the queue. As simplistic as that sounds, guests immediately feel resistance to be away from their phones, thus creating a problem once again.

For the 2021 season, the park has found the ultimate solution. A set of double-sided lockers has been installed into a revised queue.

"It's very easy to use," said **Carrie Boldman**, vice president and general manager, Cedar Point. "Obviously, people can't carry a phone on that ride. It's just not a ride meant for someone to have something in their pocket, no matter what people say. We needed to take the guesswork out of safety. We positioned the lockers to where guests could keep their phones for almost all the time while in the queue. It's hard for people to give up their phones in this day and age. We understand that. We conveniently put the lockers much further in the queue. It's free to use and they retrieve their items from the other side after they ride. There's nothing more important than the safety of everyone here."

V Locker was the provider of the new locker system.

"They had a problem in the past, and we had developed a locker product that was dual sided," said **Keith Schupp**, executive vice president of sales, V Locker. "I was there on opening day and got to hear every little comment. On the back side it was pretty much 100 percent positive. Guests thought it was cool."

Numerous locker banks allow for a short window of time for riders to temporarily place keys, wallets, glasses, phones, etc., which not only ensures the utmost in safety, but also frees the rider from any anxiety of accidentally losing something, even if they thought it was secured.

"Our biggest benefit is that you don't have competing people coming and going, nor is there the opportunity to cut in line when they pick up items," said Schupp. "We have used it at other Cedar Fair parks, and it has worked phenomenally."

The same loose item system has been implemented at **Kings Dominion** on the park's Twisted Timbers roller coaster.

Because the locker system is free to use, it also eliminates any criticism of riders being forced to pay to enjoy the ride experience.

Guests first enter their birthdate on any of multiple touch screens, and then the screen shows colored icons from which the guest can choose. Upon retrieval, the same process allows guests to reopen the locker from the other side. Riders do not have to keep up with any slips of paper or remember codes.

"We connected [with Cedar Fair] at the 2019 IAAPA Expo," said Schupp. "We had won a Brass Ring Award and they stopped by to ask about it. We thought this would all happen in 2020, but … COVID happened. But we were excited to get the purchase order. It has been a great partnership."



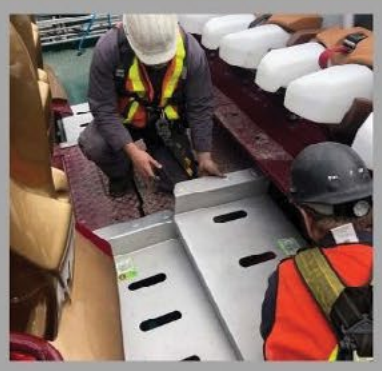


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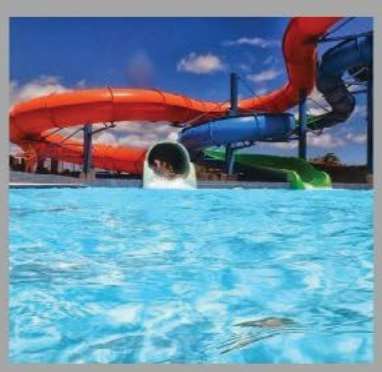
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BREAKING NEWS





With employee housing a crucial piece of the Pigeon Forge-area employment puzzle, Holtz Builders, Inc., is constructing a four-story, 136,000-square-foot residence building to house Dollywood's seasonal employees. The new complex is scheduled to be completed in May 2022.
COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

Dollywood, Holtz Builders to construct housing for park's seasonal workers

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — **Dollywood** officials announced a partnership with Wisconsin-based **Holtz Builders, Inc.**, to develop an approximately $20 million residence hall-style building on-site at the Pigeon Forge park that will accommodate more than 750 employees. Holtz also will operate the facility as one of its accommodation locations, under the company's **International Residence Hall** brand. The four-story, 136,000-square-foot building is scheduled for completion in May 2022 and offers a vital benefit to many seeking employment in Sevier County.

Residents would include temporary seasonal hosts who are employed at Dollywood through a variety of hiring programs. Those eligible for housing in the new complex include students taking part in the U.S. Summer Work Travel program; students taking part in U.S. college campus organizations like Campus Outreach, Navigators and Young Life; Dollywood college interns who are working on specific assignments that provide educational credits; and employees of other area businesses in similar programs through organizations like Sevier County's Southern Hospitality Internship Program.

"We partnered with Holtz Builders, because they have proven successful at helping similar destinations create housing options to support the needs of their growing communities," said **Tim Berry**, Dollywood vice president of human resources. "The Smoky Mountains region has proven to be one of the most popular vacation destinations in the country, and with the growth of businesses and attractions in the area, we need more employees ready to support all of those jobs. Employee housing is a crucial piece of the employment equation in this area, and we are glad to partner with Holtz to create this new opportunity here at Dollywood."

Holtz Builders has earned a stellar reputation for creating partnerships in resort communities to create safe, efficient and affordable housing for seasonal workers. The group has developed housing complexes in other tourist destinations in Wisconsin and Tennessee, as well as facilities that will soon be underway in Maryland. Dollywood provided the tract of land to Holtz for the project. Holtz will construct, maintain and manage the new property, offering an affordable housing alternative for eligible hosts.

"We strive to provide safe and affordable housing for seasonal guests that come from around the world and from the U.S.," said **Dan Bullock**, president of the Holtz Companies. "We hope we can have a positive impact on the overall experience they have here in this beautiful community in the Smoky Mountains."

Standard rooms accommodate four residents with four beds, individual lockers, a private bathroom, a large refrigerator, study desk, and a self-contained heating and air unit. ADA accessible rooms have space for two individuals and contain the same amenities as the standard rooms. Additionally, a common kitchen, gathering space and laundry facilities are included. Wifi is included and available throughout the building.

The ground floor of the U-shaped building will be unfinished when residents move in next year, but will be completed soon after to provide additional office space and other facilities designed to support Dollywood hosts.

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